# ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

# ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE


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*by VAN SILLER*

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*Laird knew little about Donna, the strange, beautiful girl he had married, but he was soon to learn that she moved always in an atmosphere of violence. First an attempt was made on his life, and then a house-guest was murdered; when he probed into Donna's past, he found a queer story of her first husband's sudden, violent death. The pattern grew swiftly clear: he was in love with a woman who seemed very close to insanity, who perhaps was a murderess, perhaps was waiting to kill again. But even in the face of such doubts he still loved her, and he struggled desperately to prove to himself that she was innocent, knowing his own life was the price he would pay for failure.*

*(Abridged Edition)*

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*"Dramatic and suspenseful . . ."*

The New York Times

# *BIBLIOGRAPHIC BIBBLE-BABBLE*

*Roy Vickers has two significant detective-story creations to his everlasting credit. The more important of the two is the Department of Dead Ends, that fascinating bureau of Scotland Yard which has proved Mr. Vickers to be the most brilliant contemporary manipulator of the "inverted" detective story. The lesser conception is that of ethereal, saint-faced Fidelity Dove, one of the most accomplished lady larcenists in the fictional history of crime . . . At the time we published* THE DETECTIVE SHORT STORY: A BIBLIOGRAPHY *(1942), we thought we had a first edition of* THE EXPLOITS OF FIDELITY DOVE. *As a matter of fact, we had in our collection two copies of this very scarce book, one bound in gray cloth and the second, identical in all other respects, bound in light blue cloth. On the basis of these two variants we listed the first edition as published in 1935 by George Newnes of London. There was nothing about either copy of the book that made us even remotely suspicious — they both seemed like genuine first editions. But recently we discovered a book which confirmed for the umpteenth time the utter fallibility of bibliographic data and research.*

*From one of our London bookscouts came an orange-cloth book clearly titled* THE EXPLOITS OF FIDELITY DOVE. *The volume contained twelve tales — exactly the same in number, sequence, titles, and text as the dozen stories in our gray and light-blue books of the same name. Now, however, there was one highly suspicious difference: the orange cloth was much superior in quality to the gray and light-blue cloth of the other copies — and better quality binding invariably suggests the true first edition. Moreover — and this is the astonishing revelation — the orange-bound volume was credited to an author by the name of David Durham!*

*A transatlantic check-up through our bookscout added further mystery: the British Museum of London had a record of the Durham book but it had no record that David Durham and Roy Vickers are one and the same person! The Durham book, however, was deposited for copyright at the British Museum in 1924 — eleven years prior to the volume signed as by Roy Vickers, thus establishing beyond doubt that the Roy Vickers edition was merely a reprint. Needless to add, our original bibliographic entry on Fidelity Dove was completely inaccurate.*

*Now, irrelevantly, read "The Death Position Enigma," the newest Department of Dead Ends story by Roy Vickers, alias David Durham. "The Death Position Enigma" is another excellent example of Roy Vickers's continuing mastery in the art of writing the "inverted" detective story.*

# THE DEATH POSITION ENIGMA

*by ROY VICKERS*

ARNOLD HABERSHON, chartered accountant, was the kind of man you would never notice — a fussy little man, the slave of his own routine. When he dressed in the morning, he unconsciously timed his movements to those of the service maid, who was as regular as himself in her habits. He adjusted his tie as the maid left the flat. He knew that his breakfast would be waiting, and that on the table would be *The Times* and *The Daily Record.*

It was a largish flat for a man living by himself. Spare bedroom, never used, sitting-room, and dining-room.

From the doorway of the dining-room he could glimpse the headlines of *The Record* — a glimpse that ended his uncertainty. As usual, he turned and shut the door. Only, on this particular Monday morning, he took longer over it than usual.

In that paper, ran his unspoken thought, I shall probably find that I have made the traditional mistake that leads to the gallows. It will not be possible to take evasive action. It will be possible only to preserve one's dignity.

When a respectable citizen of mild habits commits murder, his reactions are inevitably different from those of the crook who kills in the course of business. Remorse, however, is rare. Habershon's sense of sin was transferred to Webber, his victim — for wantonly thrusting Habershon into the horror of committing murder. Such precautions as he had taken against discovery had been inspired less by fear than by a sort of moral duty to himself. If the precautions should fail — again, the blame must be laid at the door of the unspeakable Webber.

HOUSEHOLDER SHOT DEAD, proclaimed *The Record.* DEATH POSITION ENIGMA.

*Death position enigma!* "These fellers yell themselves into sheer meaninglessness!" snorted Habershon, and turned in disgust to *The Times*, where he found only a five-line paragraph. *The Record* carried two columns. Habershon read, at first with resignation, then with astonishment.

"That isn't an enigma — it's an absurdity — and a lie as well!" he exclaimed aloud.

He read on with the growing suspicion that someone else must have entered after he had left.

> *The murderer made entry by the window and left by the front door, as indicated by one-way footprints on the flower bed (photo back page) and soil trodden into the sitting-room carpet.*

"But I didn't enter by the window. . . . Oh yes, I did! When I went back."

In a mess of sensational verbiage, *The Record* had smothered a clear-cut account. On Sunday morning, a telephone linesman had called the police to Webber's brick-built bungalow, which stood by itself on the fringe of an Essex village. A car, not that of the deceased, had left double tire tracks in the garden, from which footprints led to the window of the sitting-room. The dead man was found sitting at his writing table. The position was so unusual that the photographs taken by the police were even more descriptive than the report, more credible than the actuality.

The photographs showed a bulky man, apparently alive, leaning forward in a natural position, his left hand holding the telephone receiver to his ear, the left elbow resting on the table. The right hand was clenched, the thumb extended downwards — the right arm suspended exactly nine and one-half inches *above* the writing table.

Thus the illusion was complete of a man interrupted in a telephone conversation by the entry of a friend. While continuing to speak on the telephone the man signals to his friend that some joint hope has been frustrated. Or he might have been indicating some flat object on the table. Whatever it was, the fist and the extended thumb gave an impression of great urgency.

Called on the Sunday morning, Detective Inspector Karslake certainly regarded the position of the corpse as an enigma. It made sense only if one could imagine that Webber had been suddenly frozen to death, whereas in fact he had been killed by a pistol shot. The body of a man who has been shot did not, he knew, behave as if the man had been suddenly frozen to death. The pose was so lifelike — one waited for the thumb to come down on the table! It was like one of those statues of arrested motion — the horse with one hoof perpetually poised.

"We don't know yet whether he ever said anything on that telephone, Doctor," said Karslake. "But we know that he lifted the receiver at around nine-thirty on Saturday night. As the receiver was not replaced, the girl sounded the buzzer but got no answer. In the morning a linesman came here and — when he saw that — called the local police." Karslake glared at the corpse as if it were a personal insult. "Have you ever seen anything like it, Doctor?"

"Not *exactly* like it. But you've seen freak effects yourself caused by *rigor mortis*."

"But it isn't a freak effect! He was doing something. Telephoning and — look at that thumb! If he wasn't saying 'thumbs down' to someone, he was jamming it hard on a bell-push or something. And there's no bell-push. And there was no one in the house to answer a bell, and there's no wire from this room anyway. *Rigor mortis* can't set in with a bang, can it?"

"No. The time varies very considerably with the state of the body. I can't give you the duration in this

case — that's a job for the Home Office analyst. Strictly off the record, you can take it that *rigor*, sufficient to support that arm, couldn't have set in under an hour at the very soonest."

"But you told me the body had not been moved since death!" protested Karslake.

"Correct! I can give you this starting point, Inspector. Death would not have been instantaneous. He could have lived for about seven or eight minutes after that wound. He might or might not have been conscious for several minutes. He would be able to move his arms — able to pick up the telephone, but I don't think he would have been able to speak intelligibly.

"At the moment of death," continued the doctor, "the left arm could have been as you see it now. But not the right arm. Definitely impossible! The right arm must have been *supported.*"

The doctor's tone indicated that he could give no further help.

"What about this, sir?" asked young Rawlings, Karslake's aide. "The murderer comes in by the window, goes out by the front door, leaving it unlocked. He has forgotten something, comes back an hour or so later and moves it from under the hand of the corpse?"

"Ah!" sighed Karslake. "You mean all we've got to do is arrest the murderer and ask him what he came back for. In the meantime, young feller, you go over the whole place and collect all the loose papers containing a name and address."

The photographers and the rest of the team had completed their preliminary work. In the sitting-room they had found one set of fingerprints, not those of the deceased. There was a third set in the kitchen, later identified as those of a daily help.

When the body had been removed, Karslake made a general survey. It was a bungalow in the sense that it was a well-built house on one floor. The carpet was good: so was the furniture — good, modern stuff, not new in style but very little the worse for wear. There was a wall safe which had not been opened. In the drawer of the writing table, unlocked, were fifteen pounds. A gold cigarette case on the floor. Add thirty-odd pounds on the body of deceased and it became a reasonable inference that the motive had not been robbery.

After ensuring that the staff was usefully employed, he drove to the telephone exchange and interviewed the individual girl concerned.

"The subscriber had di-alled 'Operator' and I answered in the pre-scribed form." The girl spoke as if she were answering a call. "Failing to get an answer —"

"Quite so! Did you hear anything at all?"

"No. Except a typewriter."

That was a surprise. There was no typewriter in the bungalow.

"How long did the typewriting go on?"

"Not as much as a minute." She dropped the telephone voice. "And if

it's any help, it didn't sound like proper typewriting. My sister's a typist, so I know something about it." She reflected. "It was as if someone was underlining words, only not making a single underline — you know? — putting the underline under the actual words and leaving the spaces."

The doctor had said Webber would probably have been unable to speak. Karslake borrowed a typewriter.

"D'you mind turning your back on me?" he asked the girl. "I want to get the exact noise you heard."

He tapped one key at random, several times.

"Well it's the *sort* of noise only not the *same*, if you understand me."

Karslake tapped out three short, three long, three short — the S.O.S.

"That's it!" cried the girl. "It was *exactly* like that!"

He gave her fifteen tests. Each time he tapped the signal she spotted it, though it did not dawn on her that it was Morse.

The reporters did not find her until Monday morning. She gladly told her tale, and by now was able to repeat the signal, which the reporters recognized. She gave them a good story, and in return they left her out of it, knowing that otherwise she would be sacked for talking about her job.

In the afternoon editions, Arnold Habershon learned that the death position was no longer an enigma.

*It is now possible to state that the murderer entered the bungalow with a portable typewriter, his own property, traceable to him. In his first panic, he evidently forgot the typewriter that would identify him, and returned, an hour or more later, to remove it. The position of the arm is thus accounted for if we assume that the machine was on the writing table with the back of it towards the deceased. Mortally wounded, Webber was able to grasp the telephone receiver but not to speak. Resting his right hand on the carriage of the typewriter, he stabbed downwards with his thumb at the keyboard, tapping out — as the police have discovered — an S.O.S. in the Morse code which, unfortunately, was not fully recognized at the Exchange.*

A portable typewriter! Habershon had never even seen a portable typewriter, except in a shop window. That Morse code nonsense too! If the police believed all that, so much the better, for it must mean that they were nowhere near the trail.

Which was true. But Habershon was blissfully unaware that a typewriter which had played no part in the case — which did not, in fact, exist — was the kind of clue that could become dangerous after it had been filed — and cross-indexed under the wrong headings — in the Department of Dead Ends.

•

Habershon found that the typewriter incident steadied his nerve. He had been most afraid of his own absent-mindedness — of leaving something which would act as a visiting

card. Obviously, he had not done so, or the police would have pounced by now, nearly forty-eight hours after the murder. Webber himself could have made no note. It was — yes — fourteen years since they had been in touch. In those years, Habershon had built up a comfortable practice as an accountant. His clients regarded his anxious fussiness as an asset. He was intelligent but slow-brained, acting almost invariably on second thoughts. In those years, he knew, he had become a little rabbit of a man. At forty-three he had the personal habits of a man thirty years older.

Suppose Webber had known he was being tracked? Suppose he had stowed away somewhere one of those notes: *If I die by violence let the police look for Arnold Habershon.* For instance, had Webber perhaps been aware that his car was being followed so often. Anxiously, he began to check up with his diary.

It was now April 7th, 1936. He turned back to an entry for February 15th. There was the one word *Match.* He wondered idly why he had used a key-word no one else would understand.

He was returning after visiting a client in the City, had stood in a doorway to light a cigarette when Webber had come out of the building. It was a shock, for he had taken for granted that Webber was still in Canada — probably in jail — and would never be heard of again. Then he had seen the brass plate *Ress & Webber, Manufacturers' Agents.* He stepped into the building. Five rooms on the ground floor, which meant a very high rent. And the brass plate was not a new one. Evidently Webber had been prosperous and respectable for some years.

It had taken him a fortnight to find where Webber parked his car. Then began a long series of failures to trail the car. Habershon's temperamental hesitancy made him a poor driver. Webber, of course, was good at anything requiring physical qualities. He began to wait for Webber along the route. The trail eventually led into Essex, where alone may be found genuine country villages within twenty miles of London. Webber's bungalow was ideally situated for a murder, though Habershon had not consciously thought of it in those terms.

If he intended to murder Webber, Habershon concealed his intention from himself. At their last meeting, fourteen years previously, he had attacked Webber with his fists — in the curious conviction that the man who was conscious of being in the right always won. He was so right and Webber was so wrong that he was surprised when his blow was returned. Webber was six inches taller and forty pounds heavier, and Habershon had taken to his bed for three days.

"The man might attack me again!" That was the way Habershon explained to himself that he must pocket the revolver he had carried in the Kaiser's war — a foolish act if he had intended murder, as the revolver was registered in his name.

He had turned up about nine. He

ran his car into Webber's garden and switched off the lights — odd behavior if he intended only a few minutes of unfriendly conversation. By the time he reached the front door, it had been opened.

"Good evening!" said Webber coldly, as to a stranger who has taken a liberty.

"I want to talk to you, Webber."

"My hat, it's Arnold Habershon! Come in, old man."

In the hall, Habershon recognized an oak chest that had once been his own — more accurately, his wife's. That was disconcerting.

Webber ushered him into the sitting-room. Habershon recognized the carpet, the writing table, the chairs, the cabinet. He was thrown out of his stride.

"But this is her furniture!" he exclaimed and immediately wished he had not said it.

"Yes. I managed to save it. Your moral claim is unassailable. You can have it all if you like."

"Thanks, I don't want it." Slow-brained, he could not disentangle himself from the riddle of the furniture. "I was told you had sold it."

"I pawned it. For my fare to Canada. But I was back in three months. One of my lines turned up trumps. I got a man to finance me over here — he's my senior partner now — and we never looked back. I returned to Canada for our firm for four years — came home for good last summer. I warehoused it while I was away." Webber was becoming genial. "You've done pretty well, too, haven't you?"

Habershon let a silence hang.

"Webber, I did not come here to indulge in small talk. I came to ask certain questions. If you feel inclined to answer them, I will not inflict my society on you for any longer than is necessary."

"I'll answer any questions you like." Webber's tone was indifferent. "But I'm damn well not going to play up to that stagey stuff. Fourteen years ago! If we have to talk about it, we needn't turn on the slow music. Have a drink?"

"No thanks."

"Then you'll have some coffee to show that we both intend to behave ourselves. I've just cooked it."

As ever, he was glib and effective and as stupidly handsome as he had been at twenty-five.

"Very well. Thanks." There was the coffee layout on the writing table. "The Ashwinden set!" he exclaimed.

"Yes. But I'm afraid there are only two cups left and I keep the other in the cabinet."

Webber rose to fetch the other cup. The set had been one of the wedding presents from her father, who had designed it himself for Ashwinden's. The pot was intact and the milk jug and the sugar bowl. He had never really liked that set. It was futuristic — a tower motif with a castellated top, broad and heavy and inappropriate. The metal lid of the milk jug would pop up on its counterpoise like a jack-in-the-box. Isobel had been

very fond of it, out of affection for her father, so Habershon had made himself like it too. But he did not like it now. He was almost pleased when Webber babbled:

"By the way, that set isn't as valuable as we all thought. I declared it at a hundred and fifty pounds, but the warehouse people refused to accept it at more than twenty. D'you take milk?"

"Yes, please."

Webber poured, the pot in one hand, the milk jug in the other. The familiar action of the lid reminded Habershon vividly of Isobel, fanning his smouldering hatred of Webber.

Webber was facing him across the writing table, leaning forward on his left elbow.

"As you want to talk about things, Habershon, perhaps you'll let me begin. Your making her take her furniture was a mistake. It kept reminding her that she had walked out on you — with the result that she very soon walked out on me — which was bad for all three of us."

"Bad for you, Webber? When she left you and took that flat by herself? Before you answer, let me tell you that she wrote to me only once. While she was in that flat. Saying, among other things not complimentary to you, that she was sending you money. I have brought the letter with me. Here it is." He stretched over the table and put it within the other's reach. "You may read it."

"It's of no interest." Webber made no move to pick up the letter. "I'll take anything from you, Habershon. You can make out a case that I injured you by seducing your wife. The seduction element is wholly mythical, but let it stand. She *did* send me money. She said she wanted to pay back some of the money I had given her."

Habershon shrugged. Webber continued:

"She had given me the furniture, verbally. I intended to look after it until she asked for it back. I didn't regard it as mine until after she — until after her death. At that time I was darned nearly penniless — a state you've never experienced. And as it was true she had cleaned me out, and as she wanted to repay, I accepted the offer."

"Knowing that she had no income? Knowing how she was getting the money to pay you? Knowing that she was driven to drugs to overcome her revulsion?"

The answer came in words which — true or not — may not be spoken of a woman to a man who has loved her.

"Revulsion my foot! You surely didn't imagine that you were the first — by dozens!"

If Habershon had acted deliberately he would have fumbled with the gun and would almost certainly have missed his mark. He drew and fired across the table in a single instinctive movement.

He felt the sensation of being beside himself — of watching himself, and with vast approval. He put the revolver back in his pocket, went to the

door, turned off the light. He swaggered across the hall, opened the front door. He was about to shut it when the light in the hall offended his mood. He left Webber's home in darkness, banging the door behind him. A moment later he was banging the door of his car. He revved up the engine, making a din.

He drove to London in a leisurely manner, savoring life for the first time in fourteen years. He was no longer a rabbit — no longer a dried pea and a cold codfish — no longer nourishing a parched little soul on its own bitterness.

On his way through London he passed through the West End. The lights welcomed him. In Piccadilly he slowed down. A woman, young and springy, smiled at him as if he were her own age. He stopped and she got in and told him where to drive.

It was after midnight when he left her. The engine had grown cold, sputtered when he used the starter. At the second attempt it started.

"Good lord! I left Isobel's letter on that writing table!"

Again he stood beside himself, beyond morality and beyond fear. The police would easily track him through that letter.

He must go back for it.

If the police were already in the bungalow he would be no worse off. There was not even any particular need to hurry.

As before, he ran the car into the garden, went up to the front door before he realized that he would be unable to open it. Back to the car for a tire lever with which to force an entry.

Before rummaging for the tire lever he sat on the running board, uncertain how and where he would use it. A moonbeam revealed that a window of the sitting-room had been left open for ventilation. He stepped over the flower bed and wriggled through.

His nerve faltered as he groped for the light switch. He wanted to see nothing but Isobel's letter. He stopped groping for the switch and took out his pocket torch. He found the letter at once, snapped off the torch. He did not need it in order to reach the window.

With one leg over the sill he hesitated. The torch had shown him not only the letter but a coffee cup. The Ashwinden set. It might not be valuable, but it was an original model and the Ashwinden people probably had a record of it.

Isobel's father — Isobel's suicide — Webber — Isobel's husband. He turned back. He could still manage with the torch.

Cups and saucers, two: sugar bowl: milk jug: he had some difficulty with the coffee pot and nearly knocked it over. He laid the torch on the table while he assembled the items on the tray. He would not be able to manage the tray through the window. He carried it out through the front door. This time he shut it gently.

He set the tray on the floor of the car and drove home. The garage of the block of flats was a converted stable

yard, with individual lock-ups. No one saw him with the Ashwinden set.

He went to bed, slept better than he had slept for years, did not wake up until mid-day.

The block provided a seven day service. His breakfast, laid as usual, was cold and uneatable. He would have an early lunch.

"Where's that coffee set?"

He had put it on the hall table, had gone to wash and had forgotten it.

He found it on a shelf in the kitchen. The maid had washed it up.

If he were to destroy it now, the incident would be impressed in her memory.

Detective Inspector Rason, of the Department of Dead Ends, had never seen a calculating machine in action until one morning nearly a year after the murder of Webber. He had called at a city office about lunch time and found a solitary typist manipulating one in an outer office.

Young women of all classes were apt to discover in Rason the essential qualities of an uncle, and the girl was soon enjoying herself explaining the machine. There was actually only one thing Rason wanted to know about it.

"If you were to poke it without understanding it properly, it would sound like a sort of typewriter, wouldn't it?"

"You don't poke it at all!" giggled the girl. "It's quite easy. Try it if you want to."

"Then I'll show you something!" Rason became conspiratorial. "But it's secret. You know what my job is. I'm trusting you."

He dialled the Yard and asked for Karslake.

"Rason speaking. Listen a minute, please!" On the machine Rason slowly tapped out three short, three long, three short.

"All right," said Karslake. "You've come out without any money. Where are you?"

"Hold that kind thought," chirped Rason. "I'll come along to your room this afternoon. Goo'bye!"

Rason turned back to the machine and studied the superscription. *Ashwin Comptometers Ltd.* He wrote the name and nearby address in his notebook. Then he called on the Ashwin Company, unscrupulously suggested that he was a potential customer and obtained advertising matter.

Karslake did not return to the Yard until three. Rason had time to turn up the dossiers of the Webber case which, after a Coroner's verdict of murder by person or persons unknown, had come to him.

Then occurred one of those pieces of "luck" which often misled him but never surprised him.

In the inventory supplied by the Repository which had stored Webber's furniture while he was in Canada was the item *Ashwinden Set* (*agreed £20*).

"Webber case, sir. I've got a line. Only one end of it so far, but it's a line. You thought I was using a typewriter on the telephone this morning. I wasn't! I was using a comptometer."

Misled by a movement of Karslake's jaw, he explained: "It's a sort of typewriter that's very good at arithmetic. Look here! I've got the literature. That'll show you the keyboard. Note the name of the firm. It's going to be important!"

"I'm glad that's important," grunted Karslake. "Webber used a comptometer instead of a typewriter. And so what?"

Rason smiled indulgently.

"*Here* — is the inventory of Webber's bungalow which your staff took. No mention of a comptometer! *Here* — is the inventory of goods stored while Webber was in Canada. That item I've marked with a cross.

"AshwinDEN set!" shouted Karslake. "AshWIN comptometer!"

"Ford car — FordSON tractor!" returned Rason. "It's probably a fancy model."

"It's a comptometer, is it? Then why do they list it under 'china'?" said Karslake. "You run along and consult your niece. She'll tell you that 'Ashwinden set' means a set of china made by a world famous Pottery. Ask that telephone girl whether what she heard was not a machine but somebody tapping with a teacup. Better take a box of chocolates with you."

Rason picked up his papers and departed. Karslake, he thought, was a good man, but he always took a narrow view. After all, there might be lots of firms called Fordson of whom Henry Ford had never heard. Perhaps Mr. Ashwin had never heard of the Ashwinden Potteries. And anybody might list anything under the wrong heading.

He decided to call on the Repository people.

His official card took him straight to the managing director, who passed him to the assessments department with instructions that he was to be given the utmost assistance. The correspondence with Webber was turned up.

"It all comes back to me now," said the head of the department. "Webber declared the value at a hundred and fifty pounds. We communicated with the Pottery —"

"It *was* teacups, then?" asked Rason, crestfallen.

"A coffee set. They told us the model had been scrapped and never put into production. As such, it might have a collector's value but not a very high one — they put it at twenty to fifty pounds."

So that, decided Rason, was that! The comptometer was definitely out of it. Back to the typewriter. Over a cup of tea, he reminded himself that Karslake had scored heavily. With a muddled idea of salvaging his day's work, he alarmed the waitress by tapping the cup on the saucer in a vain attempt to produce a noise like a typewriter.

While he was tidying his desk, replacing the invoices in the Webber dossier, it occurred to him that the real coffee set had, in one way, taken the place of the imaginary comptometer.

*The Ashwinden set was in the Reposi-*

*tory's inventory and not in the police inventory!*

Webber might have sold it in the interval. But Webber had no need to sell his household effects. He had died with several thousands in the bank, a share in the business, and no dependents.

Rason decided to have a chat with the woman who had cleaned Webber's bungalow.

"I used to do his breakfast every day except Sundays," she told Rason. "He took his other meals in London, which meant I finished my work by mid-day." Pressed as to his coffee habits: "I never had nothing to do with that except buy the coffee for him. He made it himself — used to wash up too, making a rare mess on my sink. I suppose he thought I'd be sure to have an accident with his precious china, which I wouldn't have, knowing he kept it in that cabinet in the sitting-room."

"You told the police you thought there was nothing missing from the bungalow. Did you see his precious china he made all that fuss about when they let you go in on the Monday morning?"

"Well, I didn't actually see it, not with my own eyes, since you're that particular. But I did see that he'd opened a new packet of coffee which I'd left for him on the Saturday morning. So I nach'rally thought he must have had his coffee as usual before he met his fate, poor gentleman!"

"Was the sink in a rare mess when you saw it on the Monday morning?"

"Come to think of it — no, it wasn't. I expect the local police washed up, knowing I'd be out of my mind with all that botheration."

So Webber had not sold the set, nor otherwise disposed of it. Yet it had been missing. On the way back, Rason tried to work it out.

The murderer turns up with a gun and a portable typewriter, which he takes out of its case. He means to kill Webber and pinch his coffee set. He plugs Webber, thinks he's killed him outright. He grabs the coffee set but forgets the typewriter. Webber taps out his S.O.S. on the typewriter. Before morning the murderer goes back for his typewriter — or it might after all be his comptometer — packs it in its case. If he hasn't taken the coffee set on the first trip he takes it now. That would mean two hands employed, hindering his second getaway.

Rason was stimulated by his own nonsense. Whenever the facts proved that a desperate man was behaving like an imbecile child, it meant that one of the facts had slipped in upside down.

What was the upside-down of wanting a coffee set? You couldn't say "not wanting it." You had to say "wanting it not to exist."

The next day he called at the Ashwinden Potteries.

"That set was designed for us by a man named Thane. He made a great many successful designs, but that one, I regret to say, was one of his few

failures. The firm allowed him to buy it for a nominal sum. Here are the photographs and specification."

"Very novel! Sort of Windsor Castle effect!" said Rason, meaning to be polite. "Can you give me Mr. Thane's address?"

"He's dead. His widow draws a pension from the firm. I could give you her address."

Rason called on Isobel Habershon's mother and heard the tragic story of the girl's life and death. It was evening before he made contact with Detective Inspector Karslake.

"You were right, sir. Only it was coffee, not tea. I'm talking about the Webber case. I've got it all nicely buttoned up. If you're tired, I'll see to the arrest myself."

"I wasn't tired, but I am now." Karslake demanded details. He listened with growing interest, nearly lapsed into an expression of approval.

"So you'd have made an arrest if I hadn't stopped you! And what would you use instead of evidence?" As Rason looked glum, Karslake continued: "If he took that coffee set to destroy evidence he destroyed the evidence, meaning the coffee set. D'you think he's keeping it in the drawing-room cabinet until you have time to call for it? Your next step, Rason, is to get Habershon's fingerprints. If they correspond, we'll talk to him. Here, I'd better come with you."

In a year Habershon himself had changed a good deal. The hesitancy had become a mere mannerism. He was growing plump. The service maid returned his occasional greeting with increasing wintriness, due to her discovery of lipstick and even more definite evidence of a way of living of which she disapproved.

In the weeks that had followed the inquest his reborn courage enabled him to take stock of his position. He made a night trip to Holland for the purpose of dropping his revolver into the North Sea. When that had been accomplished he reckoned that he could deal with any questions that might be asked.

He was entertaining a fair friend in the drawing-room when Rason and Karslake called. While he was taking them into the dining-room, he had to make a definite effort of memory to marshal the items of his defense.

"I think, Mr. Habershon," began Rason, "that you knew Francis Webber?"

"Well — er — yes. That is, I saw a lot of him at one time."

"When did you last see him?"

"At his bungalow, round about eight o'clock on the night he was murdered."

He had worked out that answer ten months ago. It was the opening gambit of Plan A, which dealt with routine inquiries. He saw the detectives exchange puzzled glances — which was in line with the plan. He continued:

"I did not come forward at the time as I could contribute nothing. And I had very strong reasons for re-

maining in the background. The fact that you have come here suggests you know that a good many years ago he eloped with my wife."

"That was not a sufficient reason," said Karslake severely. "We found unidentified fingerprints, which gave us a lot of trouble."

"I'm very sorry. I was in his sitting-room for about five minutes. The prints are probably mine."

"Very probably!" agreed Rason. "We'll soon see." It was Rason's case. Karslake, though senior, produced the print-frame from his bag and instructed the excessively willing Habershon.

While Karslake was comparing Habershon's prints with the chart of those taken in the bungalow, Rason asked:

"When you went into Webber's sitting-room, did you notice any object that was familiar to you?"

That told Habershon that they were on the track of the Ashwinden set. Plan A of the defense assumed that the set would not be mentioned. The question brought Plan B into action — which was several points closer into the wind.

"I noticed a great many. All the furniture in the sitting-room and in the hall — I daresay throughout the bungalow — had belonged to my wife and was part of our home. It was indirectly on that account that I went to the bungalow. Please let me explain.

"I lost touch with Webber some fourteen — fifteen — years ago." Habershon had written the explanation and memorized it last year: he must not make another slip over time. "I heard he had gone to Canada. My wife was dead and that unhappy chapter in my life was closed. In February last year Webber and I met in the City by chance. We recognized each other but did not speak.

"On April 5th when I returned home, he was waiting outside the garage here for me. He must have been waiting for hours. He told me that he still had my wife's furniture and felt that he must return it to me if I would accept it. We were both civil, but not cordial. I said I did not want the furniture, but would like to have a certain coffee set which had personal associations. It had been designed by her father, who had been with Ashwinden Potteries."

"Oh!" At this wholesale admission a sound like a wail came from Rason. Karslake grinned. "Go on, Mr. Habershon."

"Webber, of course, agreed. I said I would not give him the trouble of packing it, but would collect it myself. We arranged that I should follow his car to the bungalow there and then. We arrived about eight."

"What's become of that coffee set?" asked Rason.

"Nothing. I have it in a cabinet in the drawing-room. I'll get it, if you'd like to see it."

Habershon went out, leaving the door open. Karslake spoke in an undertone.

"So far the evidence amounts to a grand total of nix! D'you remember your little piece about you making the arrest if I was too tired to help?"

From the hall came Habershon's voice, speaking to the fair friend.

"No, no! There's no need to go. When they've inspected this set, we shall have finished."

Habershon put the set on the dining table. The coffee pot and the milk jug, looking like fragments of Windsor Castle; the sugar bowl; two surviving cups.

Rason sat down in front of it, took out the photograph and specification, to check. While doing so, he started a new line.

"You were commissioned in the Infantry in 1915, Mr. Habershon. Have you still got your revolver?"

"No — er — no!" Habershon was disconcerted. The revolver had not figured even in Plan B. "I missed it years ago. I suppose it was stolen."

Karslake had winced at the question. Rason, instead of following it up, was fooling with the coffee pot and a tape measure. Karslake cut in with his own question.

"When you were in the sitting-room, was there a typewriter on the table — or a comptometer?"

"I don't remember noticing one." Plan B covered that question. "I read in the papers of something of the kind being used to send a signal in Morse, but I can't offer any suggestion."

Rason had produced another photograph from his dispatch case.

"Take a look at that, Mr. Habershon."

Habershon took the photograph, mounted on a millboard. He caught his breath and nearly dropped it.

It was a photograph of Webber taken after death, emphasizing the "death position enigma."

"I confess I find that somewhat — er — nauseating!" said Habershon.

"Then keep your eye on the diagram at the side," snapped Rason. "Note that dotted line down from the dead man's arm to the table. That arm was standing nine and a half inches above the table in mid-air. Got that? *Your coffee pot is exactly nine and a half inches high!* You collected that set some hours *after* you'd shot him, Habershon."

"I — er —"

"Shut up! Anything you say will be used in evidence against you. Not that it matters what you say now. Here's the set-up!"

Rason leaned over the dining table, his left hand near his ear, as if holding a telephone receiver. His right arm was partly extended, the forearm resting on the castellated roof of the coffee pot.

"Thumb seven and a half inches above the table. If you measure this, Mr. Karslake, you'll find it's okay."

He turned his right thumb down till the tip rested on the knob on the lid of the milk jug. Half of the metal lid sprang up on its counterpoise like a jack-in-the-box.

Rason stabbed with his thumb. *Three short — three long — three short.*

# LE CHÂTEAU DE L'ARSENIC

*by GEORGES SIMENON*

He hesitated a moment. Then he stood on tiptoe and rang the bell. He was a small man, and the bell was situated in an abnormally high position. The Little Doctor knew that he was being watched — not only from inside the château but from the houses in the village, where they must be wondering who, at such a time, would dare to ring this bell.

He was in a village in a clearing in the forest of Orléans, but the clearing was rather small for the château and the few surrounding cottages. The forest seemed to overflow, stifling the village, and you felt that the sun had difficulty in getting through the thick branches. A few thatched roofs, a grocer's shop, an inn — all low, narrow houses — and then the château, too large, too old, falling to ruin and looking like an impoverished aristocrat in rags, but rags which had once been well cut.

On the first floor a curtain moved. A pale face appeared for a moment at one of the windows.

Finally, a servant came to the door. She was a girl of about twenty to twenty-five, pleasant-looking, prettier than you would have expected to find in such a place.

"What do you want?" she asked him.

"I want a word with Monsieur Mordaut."

"Have you an appointment?" she asked.

"No."

"Are you from the Public Prosecutor?"

"No, but if you would be good enough to give him my card . . ."

She went away. A little later she came back with another servant, a woman of about fifty with a forbidding face.

"What do you want with Monsieur Mordaut?"

Then the Little Doctor, despairing of ever passing this closely guarded gate, spoke frankly. "I have come about the poisonings," he said, with the same charming smile he would have used to give someone a box of chocolates. The face had reappeared behind the first-floor window. Probably Monsieur Mordaut.

"Come in, please," he said. "Is that your car? You had better drive it in too, or the children will soon be throwing stones at it."

The drawing-room, like the exterior of the château, was sad and dusty. So also was Monsieur Mordaut in his long, old-fashioned jacket, and with his sunken cheeks covered by a lichen-like, short, dirty gray beard.

"Good morning, sir," said the Little Doctor. "I must apologize for having almost forced an entry, partic-

ularly as you have probably never so much as heard of my name."

"No, I haven't," said Monsieur Mordaut with a shake of his head.

"Well, sir, as others are interested in handwriting or palmistry, I have a passion for human problems — for the puzzles which, in their early stages, are nearly always crimes."

"Pray continue."

"I have been extremely interested in the rumors which have been current for some time about you and this château. I came here to discover the truth; that is to say, to find out whether you murdered your aunt Emilie Duplantet; then your wife, who was Félicie Maloir before you married her; and lastly your niece, Solange Duplantet."

It was the first time that the Little Doctor had addressed such a speech to another human being, and his nervousness was aggravated by the fact that he was cut off from the world by a long corridor, with innumerable doors leading off it. Monsieur Mordaut had not stirred. At the end of a long piece of black cord he swung an old-fashioned eyeglass; his expression was infinitely sad.

"You were right to speak frankly. . . . Will you have something to drink?"

In spite of himself the Little Doctor shivered. It is somewhat disconcerting to be offered a drink by a man you don't know, and whom, in a slightly indelicate fashion, you have just accused of being a poisoner.

"Please don't be afraid. I'll drink out of the bottle before you. Did you come by the village?"

"I stopped at the inn for a minute to book a room."

"That was unnecessary, Monsieur . . . Monsieur . . ."

"Jean Dollent."

"I would be honored, Monsieur Dollent, if you would stay here."

Monsieur Mordaut uncorked a dusty bottle of an unusual shape. Almost without thinking, the Little Doctor drank one of the best wines he had ever tasted.

"You must stay here as long as you please. You must have your meals with us. You shall have the run of the château, and I will answer all your questions to the best of my ability. Excuse me a moment."

He pulled a long woollen cord, and somewhere in the building a reedy bell sounded. Then the old servant who had opened the door to Dollent appeared.

"Ernestine, please lay another place at table. Also prepare the green room for monsieur. He is to be treated here as if it were his own house, and you must answer any questions he puts to you."

Once more alone with Dollent, he sighed. "You are probably surprised by this reception. But there are, Monsieur Dollent, moments when one jumps at no matter what chance of salvation. If a fortune-teller, a fakir or a dervish offered to help me, I would treat him in the same way."

He spoke slowly, in a tired voice, fixing his eyes on the worn carpet

while, with exaggerated care, he wiped the lens of the eyeglass which he never used.

"I am a man who has been pursued from birth by ill luck. If there were competitions of bad luck, championships for bad luck, I would be certain to win. I was born to attract unhappiness, not only to myself, but to all those around me.

"My grandparents were extremely rich. My grandfather Mordaut built a large part of the Haussmann area in Paris and was worth millions. The day I was born he hanged himself because of some political scandal in which he was involved. As a result of the shock, my mother developed puerperal fever and died within three days. My father tried to make good his father's losses — but of his whole fortune only this château remained. I came here when I was five. Playing in the tower I accidentally set fire to a whole wing, which was destroyed, and with it many objects of value."

This was becoming too much. It was almost comical.

"I could continue the list of my misfortunes indefinitely."

"Excuse me," interposed the Little Doctor, "but it seems to me that up to now those misfortunes seem to have fallen more on others than on yourself."

"Ah! Don't you think that it is just that which is the greatest misfortune? Eight years ago my aunt Duplantet, recently widowed, came to live with us, and six months later she was dead of a heart attack."

"They say that she had been slowly poisoned by arsenic. Hadn't she taken out a life insurance policy in your favor, and didn't you come into a considerable sum of money through her?"

"A hundred thousand francs — scarcely enough to restore the south tower which was crumbling away. Three years later my wife . . ."

"Died in her turn, and again of a heart attack. She also had taken out a policy which brought you . . .?"

"Which brought me the accusations you know of, and a sum of two hundred thousand francs."

"Finally," said the Little Doctor, "a fortnight ago, your niece Solange Duplantet, an orphan, died here, at the age of twenty-eight, of a heart attack, leaving you the Duplantet fortune, which is nearly half a million francs."

"But in property and land — not cash," corrected the strange man.

"This time tongues were really loosened, anonymous letters poured into the Préfecture, and an official investigation was set on foot."

"The police have already been three times and found nothing. On two other occasions I was called to Orléans for questioning. I think I would be lynched if I dared appear in the village."

"Because traces of arsenic were found in the three corpses."

"It seems they always find some. . . ."

"You have a son?" asked the Little Doctor rather abruptly.

"Hector, yes. You must have

heard of him. As the result of an illness in childhood, the growth of his brain was arrested. He lives here in the castle. At twenty-two he has the body of a man and the intelligence of a child of nine. But still, he's harmless."

"The person who showed me in, Ernestine, has she been here a long time?"

"Always. She was the daughter of my father's gardener. Her parents died and she stayed on."

"She never married?"

"Never."

"And the young woman?"

"Rose," said Monsieur Mordaut with a slight smile, "is Ernestine's niece. For nearly ten years now she has worked here as a maid. When she first came she was a schoolgirl of sixteen."

"Have you any other servants?"

"None. I am not rich enough to live in great style. I live among my books and my works of art. Incidentally, Ernestine hasn't got cancer," said Monsieur Mordaut, "but she talks of nothing else. Since her sister, Rose's mother, died of cancer, she has an unshakable belief that she has also got it. At one moment it's in her back, another in her chest, another in her stomach. She spends half her time consulting doctors, and she's furious that they can't find anything. If she consults you, I advise you . . ."

But a furious Ernestine now appeared before them.

"Well, are you going to have any lunch or not?"

Monsieur Mordaut turned to the Little Doctor and said sadly:

"Please fear nothing. I will eat from each dish and drink out of each bottle before you touch them. It no longer means anything to me. You should know, Doctor, that I am also suffering with my heart. For the last three months I have felt the same symptoms that my aunt, my wife and my niece all complained of at the beginning of their illnesses."

It really required a very good appetite to eat that meal. The Doctor wondered if he wouldn't have done better to eat and sleep at the inn. Hector ate gluttonously, like a badly brought-up child. It was alarming to watch this large youth with the face of a cunning urchin.

"What do you want to do this afternoon, Doctor?" asked Monsieur Mordaut. "Can I be of any help?"

"I would really like to be free to come and go as I please. I'll look round the grounds. Perhaps I'll ask the servants one or two questions."

And that is where he started. He moved off towards the kitchen where Ernestine was washing the dishes.

"What's he been telling you?" she asked immediately, with the habitual distrust of the peasant. "Did he tell you about my cancer?"

"Yes."

"Ah. He told you it wasn't true, didn't he? But he swears his heart is bad. Well, I'm certain that it's nothing of the sort. He's never had a bad heart. There's nothing wrong with him."

She talked on without stopping her work, and one was conscious of her health and strength. She must once have been a lovely girl, buxom as her niece.

"I wanted to ask you, Doctor. Can cancer be given to people by arsenic or other poisons?"

He didn't want to say yes or no, because it seemed more profitable to play on the old servant's fears.

"What do you feel?" he replied.

"Pains. As if something was being driven into me. Mostly in the bottom of my back, but sometimes also in my stomach."

He mustn't smile. It would make him an enemy.

"I'll examine you, if you like."

"As soon as I've finished the washing up," she replied with alacrity.

The examination had lasted a good quarter of an hour, and each time the Little Doctor showed signs of abandoning it, Ernestine called him firmly to order.

"You haven't taken my blood-pressure."

"What was it last time?"

"Minimum 9, maximum 14 on the Pachot apparatus."

"Well, well!" laughed the Little Doctor. "I see you know your medical terms."

"Indeed I do," she retorted. "You can't buy health, and I want to live to be a hundred and two like my grandmother."

"Have you read any medical books?"

"Gracious, yes. I had some sent from Paris only a month ago."

"I suppose your books mention poisons?"

"Of course, and I won't conceal the fact that I've read every word about them. When there have been three cases under your nose, you learn to look out. Especially when you're in a similar position.

"What did they find when Madame Duplantet died?" she went on. "That she had taken out a life insurance in favor of monsieur. And when his wife died? Another insurance. Well, I'm insured too."

"And the money goes to your niece, I suppose?"

"No. To Monsieur Mordaut. And it's no small matter. A hundred thousand francs!"

"Your master insured your life for a hundred thousand francs! When was this?"

"At least fifteen years ago. A long time before Madame Duplantet's death, so I thought nothing of it at the time."

It was before Madame Duplantet's death. This fact was immediately catalogued in a corner of the Little Doctor's mind.

"Has your master always lived in such a secluded way? Hasn't he ever had any love affairs?"

"Never."

"Er . . . your niece Rose is young and pretty. Do you think . . ."

She looked him straight in the eye before replying. "Rose would never allow it."

She had been dressed for some time, and had again become the stern old cook. She seemed comforted. Her whole expression proclaimed: "Now you know as much as I do. It was my duty to tell you."

It was a strange home. Built to house a least twenty people, with an endless succession of rooms, corridors and unexpected staircases and corners, it now sheltered only four inhabitants. And these four people, instead of living close together as would have been expected — if only to give themselves the illusion of company — seemed to have used an extraordinary amount of ingenuity in isolating themselves as much as possible. Ernestine's room was on the second floor at the farthest corner of the left wing.

The Little Doctor went in search of Rose.

He had just made a rapid calculation. Rose had been in the house for about a year when Madame Duplantet had died from arsenic — or from a weak heart. Could one conceive of a poisoner sixteen or seventeen years old?

He listened at the door of Rose's room, heard no sound and softly turned the handle.

"Well, come on in," she said impatiently. "I've work to do."

It was obvious that she had expected him to come. She had prepared his reception. The room had been tidied and some papers had been burned in the fireplace.

"Monsieur Mordaut gave me permission to question everyone in the house. Do you mind?"

"Go ahead. I know already what you're going to ask me. My aunt told you I was Monsieur Mordaut's mistress, didn't she? The poor thing thinks of nothing else; that's because she's never been married or had a sweetheart."

The Little Doctor looked at the ashes in the fireplace and asked more slowly, "Haven't you a lover or a fiancé?"

"Wouldn't that be natural at my age?"

"Can I know his name?"

"If you can find it out. . . . Since you are here to look, look. Now, I must go downstairs, because it's my day to polish the brass. Are you staying here?"

"Yes, I'll stay here if you don't object."

She was annoyed, but she went out and he heard her going down the stairs. She probably didn't know that it is possible to read the writing on burned paper. She hadn't bothered to disperse the ashes, and there was an envelope which, being of thicker paper, had remained almost intact. At one corner the word "restante" could be made out, which led him to suppose that Rose fetched her mail from the village post office. On the other side the sender had written his address, of which the words "Colonial Infantry Regiment" and, lower down, "Ivory Coast" could be deciphered.

It was almost certain that Rose had

a follower, a fiancé or a lover, who was at present stationed with his regiment in the tropics.

"I'm afraid I'm disturbing you once more, Monsieur Mordaut. You told me this morning that you felt pains from time to time. As a doctor I should like to make sure, above all, that there's no question of slow poisoning."

Without protest and with the trace of a bitter smile the master began to undress.

"For a long time," he sighed, "I have been expecting to suffer the same fate as my wife and aunt. When I saw Solange Duplantet die in her turn . . ."

The consultation lasted half an hour, and the Little Doctor became more and more serious.

"I wouldn't like to say anything definite, until I had consulted some colleague with more experience. Nevertheless, the discomfort you have been feeling could be caused by arsenical poisoning."

"I told you so." He was neither indignant nor even afraid.

"One more question. Why did you insure Ernestine's life?"

"Did she tell you about it? Well, it's quite simple. One day, an insurance salesman called. He was a clever young man with a persuasive manner. He pointed out that there were several of us in the house and all of us getting on in years. . . ."

"I know exactly the arguments he used. Someone was bound to die first. It would be sad of course, but why shouldn't it at least help you to restore the castle? If all your family died . . . But, excuse me," the Little Doctor interrupted himself. "Is Hector insured too?"

"The company won't insure mental deficients. Anyhow, I allowed myself to be persuaded, and I insured Ernestine in spite of her wonderful health."

"Another question. Did you insure yourself?"

This idea seemed to strike him for the first time.

"No," he said in a reflective voice.

Should one treat him as an inhuman monster, or just pity him? Or should one read the greatest cunning into everything he said? Why had he so willingly given the Little Doctor a free hand? Wouldn't a man who was capable of poisoning his wife and two other women also be capable of swallowing poison himself, but in insufficient quantities to do any real harm?

The Little Doctor, overcome by a kind of disgust which his curiosity only just succeeded in dominating, wandered round the château and the grounds. He was standing by the gate, wondering if a stroll to the village wouldn't be a good thing — if only for a change of atmosphere — when sounds of confusion reached him, followed by a loud cry from Ernestine.

He ran round a corner of the château.

Not far from the kitchen was an old barn containing some straw and milking utensils. Inside this building

Hector lay dead, his eyes glassy, his whole face contorted. The Little Doctor did not even have to bend down to diagnose.

"A large dose of arsenic."

Near the corpse, stretched out on the straw, lay a bottle with the inscription "Jamaica Rum."

Monsieur Mordaut turned slowly away, a strange light in his eyes. Ernestine was crying, while Rose, standing a little on one side, kept her head lowered.

Half an hour later, while they were waiting for the police who had been summoned by telephone, the Little Doctor, his brow covered in a cold sweat, was wondering whether he would live to see the end of this investigation.

He had just elucidated, in part at least, the story of the bottle of rum.

"Don't you remember the conversation I had with Monsieur Mordaut after lunch?" asked Ernestine. "You were there. He asked me what there was for dinner and I said 'A vegetable soup and a cauliflower.' "

She was quite right. The Little Doctor remembered vaguely having heard something of the sort.

"Monsieur Mordaut replied that as you were staying here it wasn't enough, and asked me to make a rum omelette."

"When you need rum," asked Dollent, "where do you get it from?"

"The cupboard in the dining room, where all the spirits are kept."

"Have you a key?"

"No, I ask for it when I want it."

"Did you return the key?"

"Yes, to Monsieur Mordaut."

"What did you do with the rum?"

"Put it on the kitchen mantelpiece, while I cleaned the vegetables."

"Did anyone come into the kitchen? Did you see Hector wandering round?"

"No."

"Did you leave the kitchen?"

"Only for a few minutes to feed the dogs."

"Was Hector in the habit of stealing drinks?"

"It has been known to happen. Not only drinks. He was terribly greedy; he stole anything he could lay his hands on, and went off, like a puppy, to eat it in a corner."

What would have happened if Hector hadn't found the bottle of arsenic and supposed it to contain rum?

Ernestine would have prepared the omelette. Would anyone have noticed an unusual taste? Wouldn't any bitterness have been put down to the rum? Who would have managed not to eat the omelette — an omelette made in the kitchen, served by Rose, with Monsieur Mordaut, Hector and the Little Doctor in the dining room?

There was no dinner at the château that evening. The police were in possession, and two of them stationed at the gate had difficulty in restraining the crowd, which was becoming noisy.

In the dilapidated drawing-room Monsieur Mordaut, white and hag-

gard, tried to understand the questions which were flung at him by the police. When the door opened after the interview, he was handcuffed. He was led into an adjacent room to remain in custody of two policemen.

How often had Dollent said to himself: 'A solid fact, even one, and then, if you're not sidetracked, if you don't lose the thread, you must automatically arrive at the truth.'

Solid facts. They were:

1. Monsieur Mordaut had placed no obstacle in the way of the Little Doctor's investigation and had insisted on his staying at the château.

2. Ernestine was strong and healthy. She counted on living to be a hundred and two like her grandmother, and everything she did was with this single aim in view; and she was haunted by the idea of cancer.

3. Ernestine said that her niece was not Monsieur Mordaut's mistress.

4. Rose was healthy, too, and had a lover or fiancé in the Colonial forces.

5. Rose also said that she was not Monsieur Mordaut's mistress.

6. Monsieur Mordaut showed all the symptoms of the beginnings of slow arsenical poisoning.

7. Like the three dead women, Ernestine had a life insurance which would be paid to her master.

"Would you like to know what I really think?" It was Ernestine's turn to be questioned in the ill-lit drawing room.

"Well, my idea is that my master has gone slightly mad . . . and when he knew that he was being found out, he preferred to finish with it all. But, as he was unbalanced and not like other people, he didn't want any of us to survive him.

"If poor Monsieur Hector hadn't drunk that rum, we should all be dead by now, including the Doctor."

This thought gave Dollent shivers down his spine.

"Monsieur," he murmured to the Police Superintendent, moving towards the door, "I'd like to have a word with you in private."

They spoke in the corridor, which was as gloomy as everywhere else in the house.

"I suppose — I hope that you have the necessary powers," the Little Doctor concluded. "There is still time . . . if you send an officer by car."

His work was over. The mystery was solved, and as usual, it had been in a single flash. Diverse facts, little points of illumination in the fog, and then, suddenly . . .

The only way in which the Superintendent and the Little Doctor had managed to escape public curiosity was to take the banqueting chamber on the first floor of the little inn.

After an omelette, made not with rum but with *fines herbes*, they had ordered stewed rabbit, which they were now eating.

"Until we hear from the solicitor, all that I can tell you, Monsieur, is simply hypothesis.

"Well, I was struck by the fact that

a man who took out a life insurance for everyone else didn't take one out for himself. If the man is a murderer, and if his object is to get the money from all those policies, what would he do to conceal his intention? First and foremost take out a policy for himself, so as to avert suspicion. . . . Monsieur Mordaut has no life insurance. For some time he has had no family. For some time also he has been suffering from the effects of slow arsenical poisoning, just like the previous victims. So I ask, who will inherit on his death? Which is why I asked you to send an officer to the solicitor.

"Follow me closely now," said the Little Doctor. "It would seem that the person who inherits from Monsieur Mordaut must almost inevitably be the murderer. . . ."

"And the murderer is?"

"A moment. Do you want to know who I think is Monsieur Mordaut's heir? Rose."

"So that . . ."

"Not so fast. Let me follow my fantasy, if I can use such a word, until your officer returns from the solicitor. I came to the conclusion that at some time, years ago no doubt, Mordaut and Ernestine were lovers. The years went by. He married to restore his fortunes, and Ernestine didn't oppose the match.

"She just killed his wife, slowly, as she had killed the aunt whose death brought in so much money. For she was more than Mordaut's mistress, she was his heir. She knew that one day everything he possessed would come to her. I am sure it was she, and not some insurance agent, who was behind that long series of policies. And she had the splendid idea of making him take one out for her, so that she would appear, when the time came, as a potential victim.

"You don't understand all this? It's because you don't live, as I do, in the country, and you are not familiar with long-term schemes. Ernestine intends to live a long time. It hardly matters that she wastes twenty or thirty years with Mordaut. Afterwards she'll be free, and rich. She'll have the house of her dreams and live to be as old as her grandmother.

"That's why she's so frightened of illness. She doesn't want to have worked so hard for nothing. But, the fortune she is eventually to inherit must be big enough. Emilie Duplantet, Madame Mordaut, Solange Duplantet. One by one they die, and their fortunes go to Monsieur Mordaut — and finally to Ernestine.

"What's the risk? No one will suspect her because nobody thinks she is the beneficiary of all these deaths. No one knows that she made her lover draw up a will leaving everything to her in default of direct heirs. She kills without any danger to herself. If anything happens, he will be the one to go to prison, to be condemned. She only starts worrying the day that she feels that her niece, whom she unwillingly brought into the house, is beginning to exert some influence. For Rose is young and pretty, and Mordaut . . ."

"It's disgusting," interpolated the Superintendent.

"Alas, it's life. His passion for Ernestine is transferred to her niece. Rose has a lover or a fiancé, but what does it matter to her? Rose has something of her aunt's character. She'll wait a few years. She'll wait for the inheritance her master has promised her. She doesn't have to kill anyone. Did she have any suspicions about these murders? She could ignore them, because, in the end, they fare to her benefit."

"It's been a long business, Messieurs," sighed the police officer who had had no lunch and was now confronted with the remnants of the feast. "Apart from the son," he continued, "all Monsieur Mordaut's property is left to Mademoiselle Rose Saupiquet."

The Little Doctor's eyes shone.

"Is there no other will?" asked the Superintendent.

"There was another, in which everything was left to Mademoiselle Ernestine Saupiquet, but it was altered nearly eight years ago."

"Did Mademoiselle Ernestine know?"

"No, the change was made in secret."

The Little Doctor laughed. "So now do you see it all? Ernestine didn't know about the new will. She was certain, one day, of profiting from her crimes, but she wouldn't kill Mordaut until he had amassed enough money."

"And Rose?"

"Legally she's certainly not an accomplice. But still, I wonder if she hadn't guessed what her aunt was up to."

Another bottle was placed on the table, ostensibly for the police officer. But it was the Little Doctor who helped himself first and who, after a gulp, said:

"Do you know what put me on the right track? It was when Ernestine affirmed her niece's virtue, because to doubt that would be to doubt Mordaut's virtue, and if I became suspicious of this, I might begin to suspect other things.

"In fact, we interrupted her in the middle of her work. She only killed Hector by chance in her attempt to get rid of the poison and to incriminate Mordaut. He had ordered the rum omelette for dinner. What better way to throw suspicion on him than to poison the rum? I'm sure that the rum wouldn't in fact have been poured over the omelette — but how easy to say afterwards that it seemed to have a funny smell — and so lead to the rum-bottle being examined!

"Little more would have remained to be done. And then the pretty home in the country and forty years of life lived according to her dreams."

The Little Doctor replenished his glass once more and concluded:

"There are still people, especially in the country, who make their plans far ahead. Which is why they need so desperately to live to a great age."

# *THE MAGIC WORD*

*It has often been said that letter-writing is a lost art. Don't you believe it. Your Editor is fortunate that scattered over these United States is a band of bloodhound enthusiasts who find time to keep up a criminological correspondence with EQMM in general and EQ in particular. And one of the most charming letter-writers of all is our old friend Leslie Charteris. Many a bleak morning in the past we have got up on the wrong side of the bed, come downstairs to our study morose and murderous, only to find a letter from the creator of the Saint which annihilated the gloom and filled us with everlovingkindness. Leslie Charteris's letters are irresistible, irrepressible, and in the case of the one we now quote, irrefutable. In August of 1947 Leslie wrote:*

*Dear Ellery:*

*It is my painful duty to inform you that you are a conscienceless bum.*

*It will always be a matter of grief to me that I solemnly let you make me listen to your criticism of my story, "Pearls Before Wine," on the grounds that, said you, it was somewhat improbable that in spite of the Saint's well built-up bluff the detective would still have insisted on searching the apartment.*

*And all the time, on the table in front of us [in the dining room of the Hotel Algonquin, New York City — Ed.'s Note], was a copy of EQMM containing "The Case of the Frenchman's Gloves" by Margery Allingham, in which the whole plot depends on the fact that the detectives, with far less discouragement, fail to search an apartment.*

*Your copy book is so blotted that you could scarcely clean it up even by awarding me the first prize in your next contest for "Pearls Before Wine." That temblor which was recently reported from Southern California was actually Charteris hitting the ceiling. I wish I could send you a picture of myself sneering at you.*

*Leslie, our face is red, you have us dead to rights, and touché. Chalk one up for your side, but definitely. We bow our head . . . But you readers may be wondering how Leslie Charteris's letter pulled us out of the dumps instead of sinking us even deeper. Ah, you don't know Leslie! That saintlike swashbuckler added one word — just one word — to his letter. And that one word was the magic word. Over his signature Leslie wrote:*

*Affectionately*

# SALT ON HIS TAIL

*by LESLIE CHARTERIS*

SIMON TEMPLAR propped one well-shod foot on the tarnished brass rail of the Bonanza City Hotel bar, and idly speculated on the assortment of footgear which had probably graced this brazen cylinder in its time — prospectors' alkali-caked boots, miners' hobnails, scouts' buckskins, cowhands' high heels . . . and now his own dully gleaming cordovan, resting there for a long cool one to break the baking monotony of the miles of steaming asphalt which had San Francisco as their goal.

But it was quite certain that none of the boots which in divers decades had parked themselves on that time-mellowed prop had ever carried a more picturesque outlaw, even though there was no skull and crossbones on his softly battered hat, and no pearl-handled six-shooters clung to his thighs. For Simon Templar had made a new business out of buccaneering, and hardly one of the law-breakers and law-enforcers who knew him better under his sobriquet of The Saint could have given a valid reason why the source of so much trouble should ever have acquired such a name.

He was examining the mirrored reflections of sundry characters draped along the mahogany rim (which still boasted the autograph of a Prince of Wales under a screwed-down glass plate) and wondering if any of them inhabited the paintless houses outside, when he felt a touch on his arm.

"Would it be worth a drink t'see the Marvel of the Age, stranger?"

An anticipatory hush seemed to settle gradually on the small dark room. Simon could see in the mirror that each of the characters who decorated the perimeter of the horseshoe stiffened a little as the reedy voice broke the quiet.

The Saint turned to look down into a saddle-tanned seamed face studded with mild blue eyes and topped by thin gray hair. The blue jeans were faded, so was the khaki shirt and the red necktie run through a carven bone clasp. The look in the blue eyes said that their owner expected an order to get the hell from under foot — or, at best, the polite brush-off.

"I don't know the current rate on marvels in these degenerate times," said The Saint gently, "but one drink sounds fair enough."

"Double?" spoke the oldtimer hopefully.

The bartender halted the bottle in midflight and again The Saint felt a tensing among the habitués along the brass rail.

"Double," Simon agreed; and the bartender relaxed as if a great decision had been reached, and finished pouring the drink.

The little man lifted a battered canvas grip and placed it tenderly on the bar. He reached for the drink and lifted it toward his lips. Then he set the drink back on the bar and drew himself up to a dignified five feet five.

"Beggin' your parding, mister — James Aloysius McDill, an' your servant."

"Simon Templar, and yours, sir," The Saint said gravely.

He lifted his own drink and they clinked glasses in solemn ritual, after which James Aloysius McDill demonstrated just how quickly a double bourbon can slide down a human throat. Then he opened his shabby bag and took out an oblong box of lovingly polished wood.

It was very much like a small table-model radio. A pair of broad-faced dials on its upper surface sported impressive indicator-needles. There was a stirrup handle at either end of the box and a sort of sliding scale on top.

"Nice-lookin' job, ain't she?" the little man appealed to The Saint.

"Mighty pretty," responded The Saint, gazing at it as intelligently as he would have surveyed a cyclotron.

The little man beamed. He spoke diffidently to the bartender.

"Got a silver dollar, Frank?"

The bartender obliged, with the air of one who has done this before, and the other customers duplicated his ennui. Once The Saint succumbed to the pitch for a double, the show was pretty well routined.

J. Aloysius McDill tossed the silver dollar across the room. It landed in the sawdust on the floor with a dull thump.

"Watch," he said.

He turned a switch, made some adjustments, and grasped the handles on the varnished box, which thereupon emitted a low hymenopterous humming, and advanced upon the dollar like a hunter stalking skittish game. As he neared the coin, the humming began to keen up the scale. He stood still, and the sound held steady; again toward the dollar and the wail of the box slid up and up until, held directly above the coin, it gave forth the whine of a bandsaw eating into a pine knot.

"Can't fool the Doodlebug," said McDill complacently. "See," — he held the box for The Saint to look at — "it works the same way for any other kind o' metal."

The Saint duly noted the markings etched along the sliding scale on top. He moved the indicator to "Gold" and the Doodlebug, which had been humming like a happy bee, suddenly whined like an angry mosquito. The Saint jerked back his left wrist with the gold watch on it, and the machine dropped again to a gentle hum. McDill set it on the bar, and it fell completely silent.

"Ain't she a beauty?" the little man demanded.

"Lovely," Simon agreed. "Just what you need any time you drop a silver dollar."

"She's good for more than that,"

said McDill. "She'll find the stuff they make dollars out of. That's why she's so beautiful. Takes the guesswork out of prospectin'."

"Ah, yes," Simon said. "Have you tested her in the field yet, Mr. McDill?"

A rattle of laughter cackled across the bar-room. It was as though a whiplash had been laid across the face of the little man; he flinched.

"Ask him," drawled one of the audience, "why his dingus ain't located no claims yet, if it's so good."

McDill faced the speaker, his chin high.

"Jest ain't happened to look in the right places, that's all," he said stoutly, but there was a quaver in his voice. He turned to Simon. "You've seen her, mister. You've seen what she can do. All I need's a grubstake and a little equipment. If you was, maybe, interested in minin', we c'd be pardners."

The Saint saw the general merriment waxing along the bar again, and had one of his ready quixotic impulses.

"Well, Mr. McDill," he said in a loud clear voice, "mining's a little out of my own line, but I have a friend I might be able to interest. I'm certainly impressed by your demonstration. Here's my San Francisco address." He scribbled on a card and handed it to James Aloysius McDill; then he dug into another pocket. "And here's fifty dollars for a week's option on your gadget."

He was aware of glasses being set down all along the bar, of incredulous eyes appraising his well-cut gabardines and evaluating his unimpeachable aura of prosperity and well-being; but it was mostly McDill's reaction that he cared about.

The blue eyes in the seamed old face flamed with happiness. They could not resist a single triumphant glance at the hangers-on; then the little man's hand stuck straight out.

"Put 'er there, Mr. Templar," he said, with a ring in his voice. "I'll be right here, any time your pardner wants me. Bonanza City Hotel."

Simon shook the thin, calloused hand, and beckoned the bartender. No longer bored, he stepped up with alacrity.

"Yes, sir!"

"The same, for Mr. McDill and myself," ordered The Saint. "Double," he added.

He had been installed in rooms in the Fairmont, high on Nob Hill, for the duration of a sleep and a breakfast, when his telephone asserted itself, for the first time since his arrival.

"I've called every day since I got your card," said Larry Phelan, "and I was pretty sure you'd show up within the year. What trouble did you come here to stir up?"

"None at all," said The Saint virtuously. "I am on a vacation, and I have taken a vow to right no wrong, rescue no young ladies in distress, and acquire no money by fair means or foul, until further notice."

"That's fine," said Phelan. "There's nothing in your vow about rescuing *old* ladies in distress, is there?"

"Not so fast," said The Saint. "Whose old lady is in distress?"

"*My* old lady, if you must know."

"Your mother?"

"None other."

"This," said The Saint, "is beginning to sound like a Gilbert and Sullivan duet. You can buy me lunch and tell me all about it."

Larry Phelan was tall and lean, and he had the face of a college sophomore and the mind of the top-drawer mining engineer that he was.

"My mother," he explained gloomily, over *ecrevisses au vin blanc*, "is in the situation of any elderly lady with an excess of both time and money. Especially money."

"A rather pleasant situation," commented The Saint, chewing. "Is there such a thing as too much money?"

"Some people seem to think so," said Phelan. "Did you ever hear of a guy called Melville Rochborne?"

Simon shook his head.

"It sounds like the sort of phony name that I wouldn't buy any gold mines from."

"He sold mother a gold mine," Phelan said.

"Any gold in it?"

"I defy anyone to find any gold in this particular mine," said Phelan sadly. "It's the old Lucky Nugget. Opened up with a big whoop-de-do in 1906, beautiful vein of quartz, eighteen dollars to the ton; closed in 1907 — no more quartz. No one's made a nickel on it since — even the tailings are worked out. The stock, which is what mother bought, wouldn't even serve for wrapping fish."

"There are laws," suggested The Saint, "which take care of folks who misrepresent stocks and bonds to other people."

"That's the trouble," said Phelan. "This Rochborne is an extremely smart operator. There's nothing on record — including mother's own testimony — to prove he ever claimed there was any gold in the mine."

"Didn't she ask you about it?"

"What would you think? After all," said Phelan bitterly, "I have only two degrees in engineering and one in mining. Why should anyone, even my own dear mother, consult *me* on such a topic? Obviously, a crystal ball and a turban put my credentials in the shade. I'll admit," he added, in less vehement tones, "I've been up to my ears in some very hush-hush stuff lately — uranium sources, if you must know. Top secret."

"Keep your uranium," said The Saint. "I don't like the things they do with it. What is this stuff about crystal balls?"

"My blessed mother," Phelan said reverently, "has developed an interest in the occult. In this specific case, a soothsayer from the Mystic East."

"Tea leaves, eh?" said The Saint. "Lucky numbers and cards and so forth?"

"And signs of the Zodiac," sup-

plemented Phelan. "A Swami, no less. *The* Swami Yogadevi."

"Sounds like a new cocktail. Where does *he* come in?"

"The Swami," said Phelan sourly, "is the guy who advised Mom to buy the wretched stock. She's sort of got into a habit of consulting him, I'm afraid. I suppose he makes a couple of passes at his crystal and evokes a genie, or something."

Simon cleaned up his plate and lighted a cigarette.

"One gathers, Larry, that Mama has been hornswoggled by a couple of pretty smooth operators. I almost think it's a new combination."

"Combination?"

"Of course. It must be. Don't you see how it works? Your Swami spots the suckers who have plenty of moola, and gets their confidence with his mumbo-jumbo. Which isn't illegal if he doesn't claim to predict futures. Your Mr. Rochborne peddles stocks and makes no claim for them. You can't prosecute a man for that. Separately, they mightn't get too far. Working together, they're terrific. How much," asked The Saint gently, "did your mother pay for the Lucky Nugget mine?"

"Forty-five thousand smackers," Phelan admitted glumly.

The Saint whistled. He proceeded to order coffee and then sank into a lethargy which might or might not have denoted deep thought.

"What are you looking stupid about?" inquired Larry Phelan.

"About the vacation I was going to have until you tripped into my life," said Simon wryly. "However," he added thoughtfully, "if Comrade Rochborne has forty-five G's of Mamma's, he might have someone else's G's too. I'll keep thinking about it."

He did exactly that, although for two days there was nothing to show for his thinking. But to The Saint a hiatus like that meant nothing. He knew better than anyone that those coups of his which seemed most spontaneous and effortless were usually the ones into which the hardest work had gone; that the machinery of his best buccaneering raids was labored and polished as devotedly as any master playwright's plot structure. Even then, there had to be an initial spark of inspiration to start the wheels turning.

When it came, it was nothing that he had even vaguely expected. It took the form of a chunky oblong package, crudely wrapped, which a bellboy delivered to his room.

There was a note enclosed:

*Dere Mr. Templar,*

*Ole Jimmy Mc Dill had one to meny double whiskeys an cash in his chips las nite his last rekest was send you this here dingus account of you are a reel good feller an he like you a lot same is inclose.*

*Yrs Truly*
*The Boys*
*Bonanza City*

The Saint lifted the glass in his right hand.

"Jimmy McDill," he said softly, "may there be double bourbons and unlimited credit, wherever you are."

He was happily playing with the contraption when Larry Phelan arrived to pick him up for dinner that night, and the engineer gazed at him in somewhat condescending puzzlement.

"What the hell are you doing with a Doodlebug, Saint?" he demanded; and Simon was hardly less surprised.

"How the hell did you know what it was?"

"The lunatic fringes of the business were stiff with these things during the depression. I've seen 'em in all sizes and shapes. Trouble is, none of 'em are worth anything."

"What do you mean, not worth anything?" Simon objected. "I'll bet I can pick up a silver dollar at ten feet with this gadget."

Simon produced a silver cartwheel and threw it on the carpet. Grasping the stirrup-handles, he lifted the box, and the same humming sound he had heard in the Bonanza City bar filled the room.

Simon made sure the scale pointer indicated "silver," and advanced upon the dollar. Just as it had done for James Aloyisius McDill, the humming keened up the scale until, as The Saint stood over the dollar, a malignant whining came from between his hands. He turned to Phelan triumphantly.

"This one works," he said.

"Sure," rejoined Phelan. "Now let's see how well it works."

He picked up a San Francisco telephone directory and the classified directory and piled them on top of the dollar, and the humming stopped abruptly.

"They're all the same," Phelan said sympathetically. "It seems to be possible to bounce some kind of oscillation off different metals, and make it selective according to their atomic structure, but the beam hardly has any penetration. Your lode would have to be practically on the surface, where you could see it anyhow, before a thing like this would detect it at all. I hope you didn't pay much for it."

"Only fifty bucks and a couple of drinks, and it was worth that," said The Saint: and the thought deepened in his blue eyes. "In fact, I think this is just what we needed to square accounts with Brother Rochborne and your swami."

The Swami Yogadevi had never seen a Doodlebug, but he had his own effective methods of ascertaining the presence of precious metals. His techniques depended for their success upon certain paraphernalia unknown to electronics, such as a large, spherical chunk of genuine optical glass; celestial charts populated by crabs, bulls, goats, virgins, and other mythological creatures; and many yards of expensive drapery embroidered with esoteric symbols — the whole enshrined in a gloomy and expensive apartment on Russian Hill.

There was nothing about the place to suggest that the Swami Yogadevi

had once been Reuben Haggitt, known to the carnival circuit as Ali Pasha, the Mighty Mentalist. Mr. Haggitt's wants had been simple in those days, expressed mainly in terms of tall bottles and tall blondes, and they were much the same now, under his plush exterior. There were times, the Swami Yogadevi told himself, when he wished he hadn't met Melville Rochborne, profitable though the partnership had turned out to be. For instance, there was this Professor Tattersall business.

"How should I know who's Professor Simeon Tattersall?" he asked with asperity.

Mr. Rochborne eyed the mystic with some distaste.

"I don't expect you to know anything," he said coldly. "All I want you to do is read it — if you can."

The seer pushed his turban back on his forehead and picked up the newspaper clipping again. It was from the front page of the final afternoon edition of a San Francisco daily.

CLEMENTINE VALLEY, Calif (by a staff correspondent) —
There's a lot of gold still lying around the long-abandoned Lucky Nugget Mine near here if someone will just come along with the right kind of divining rod, water witch, or a sensitive nose.

Professor Simeon Tattersall not only says that the gold is there, but asserts freely that he has the gadget that will find it. Said gadget, his own invention, he modestly styles the Tattersall Magnetic Prospector, and he plans to demonstrate its worth at the Lucky Nugget Thursday morning at 10:30 PST —

"Say!" bleated the soothsayer. "Ain't this Lucky Nugget Mine the one you sold that Phelan dame?"

"It is," said Mr. Rochborne concisely. "What I want to know now is who this Tattersall is and why he picks the Lucky Nugget to demonstrate his screwball gadget, just three weeks after we made a deal with it."

"It says here he thinks there's gold in it," said the Swami brightly.

Mr. Rochborne favored him with a look of contempt and got to his feet. He was a large man with hulking shoulders and a tanned kindly face, of the type which inspires instant trust in dogs, children, and old ladies.

"One thing I'd bet on — there's no such person as Professor Simeon Tattersall. There never was a name like that. There couldn't be."

"What're you going to do about it, Mel?" asked the sage.

"I don't know," said Mr. Rochborne darkly. "Maybe nothing. Maybe something. But one thing I do know, I'm going to be there when this 'Professor' " — he put quotation marks around the title — "holds his 'demonstration' tomorrow morning."

Simon Templar might have hoped for a more impressive turn-out in response to his carefully planted publicity, but he could also have been guilty of discounting Larry Phelan's estimate of the skepticism of local wiseacres in the matter of Doodlebugs. The Lucky Nugget mine site on Thursday morning was fairly uncrowded by seven male and two fe-

male citizens of the nearby town of Clementine Valley, all more or less the worse for wear, four small boys, three cynical reporters, two dogs, and a passing hobo attracted by the crowd. But to Simon Templar the most important spectator was a large well-built man, conspicuous in city clothes.

The Saint had arrayed himself for the occasion in what seemed a likely professorial costume of Norfolk jacket, pith helmet, and riding boots, with the addition of a gray goatee which sat rather strangely on his youthful brown face.

He eyed the gathering individually and collectively with an equal interest as he stepped from Clementine Valley's only taxicab, tenderly bearing the wooden box.

"Good morning, ladies and gentlemen," he said.

"Hey, Prof," queried a high thin voice from the group, "will she bring in London?"

This sally elicited a wave of home-town laughter, to which Simon professorially paid no heed.

When one spoke of the Lucky Nugget mine, one meant 928 feet of partially caved-in tunnel sunk into the bowels of a red-dirt pine-freckled hill. The tunnel entrance was half blocked by fallen dirt and broken timbers.

"Professor Simeon Tattersall" sapiently eyed the tunnel mouth, grasped his device, and took a step toward the opening.

"Mind if I look at your gadget, Professor?" said a genial voice.

Simon looked around and found the man in the city clothes standing at his elbow.

"Well, sir," said The Saint, in his most precise pedantic voice, "in the first place, this is not a 'gadget'; it is a highly involved and intricate extrapository reactodyne, operating according to an entirely new principle of electronics. Later, perhaps, after the demonstration is concluded, you may —"

"Not afraid I might find something phony, are you?" The big man stepped very close. "And haven't I seen your picture somewhere before?"

Professor Simeon Tattersall lowered his eyes for a single fleeting instant, then raised their candid blue gaze to the stranger's.

"You may have read about my work in mineral detection —"

"That's what it said in the paper," assented the large man jovially. "I must have been thinking about someone else. The name's on the tip of my tongue — but you wouldn't know about that." He beamed. "Anyway, Prof, I've been in the mining game a long time. Know all the dodges. I'll be watching your demonstration with great interest."

He chuckled tranquilly and rejoined the motley gallery.

There followed what radio commentators call an "expectant hush."

Simon picked up his instrument, with barely visible nervousness, and started up the slope from the mill to the small mountain of "muck" fanning out below the old mine-entrance. He skirted around its base, his audi-

ence following, and approached the steep hillside itself.

Suddenly he grasped the handles on the box again and to the obbligato of the resultant humming, began moving along the base of the hill, shifting the device to and fro as he went. The humming continued in the same even key. The trailing onlookers listened breathlessly.

Ahead of the exploration lay a large slide of loose dirt brought down by recent rains. He neared it, and all at once the box's tone slid up an octave. The Saint stopped; he moved the box to the right, away from the hill, and the tone dropped; he swung it toward the slide, and it climbed infinitesimally; he moved toward the slide, and the tone mounted until at the base of the fresh clods it was a banshee wail.

Simon Templar put down the box. In the ensuing silence he jointed a small collapsible spade and poked tentatively in the dirt.

Suddenly he dived down with one hand and came up with it held high; and between his thumb and forefinger glittered a tiny pea-sized grain of yellow.

"The Tattersall Prospector never makes a mistake," he began in his best class-room manner. "I hold in my hand a small nugget of gold. Obviously, somewhere on the hillside above us, we will find the source of this nugget. I predict —"

His words were lost in a yell as the small crowd, like one man, started up the steep bank toward the source of the slide. As Simon turned to stare at them, he found the big city observer at his elbow.

"Not good." The large man shook his head. "If I were you, Professor, I'd get the hell out of here before those boys up there find out that you salted this slide." He shook his head again. "I just remembered where I saw your face — and I expected something better from The Saint," he said. "Listen — you may have been a hot shot in your own league, but you didn't really expect to take Melville Rochborne into camp, did you?"

"It was always worth trying," said The Saint sheepishly.

He poked his spade into the slide and turned over the loose earth.

"All right, Mel," he said. "You win this time. Have yourself a shoeshine on the house."

And with a rather childish gesture he spilled a shovelful of dirt deliberately over Mr. Rochborne's shining pointed toes before he threw down the spade and turned away.

Mr. Rochborne's geniality blacked out for a moment; and then he bent to dust off his shoes.

Suddenly he seemed to stiffen. He bent down and picked up a fragment of powdery pale yellow stuff and crumbled it in his fingers.

A strange look came into his face.

A mere few hours later he was clutching his hat to his bosom and trying to hold his temperature down to an engaging glow while Mrs. Phelan gushed: "Why, Mr. Rochborne! What a pleasant surprise!"

"As a matter of fact, Mrs. Phelan," he admitted, with the air of a schoolboy caught in the jam closet, "I'm here on business. I hate to impose on you, but . . ."

"Go on, Mr. Rochborne," she fluted. "Do go on. Business *is* business, isn't it?"

"I might as well come right out with it," Rochborne said wearily. "It's about that Lucky Nugget stock you bought, Mrs. Phelan. I — well, it turns out it was misrepresented to me. I'm not at all sure it's a good investment."

"Oh, dear!" Mrs. Phelan sat down suddenly. "Oh, dear! But — my — my forty-five thou——"

"Now, Mrs. Phelan, don't excite yourself. If I weren't prepared to —"

"Telephone, Mrs. Phelan." A maid stood in the doorway.

"Excuse me," said Mrs. Phelan. "Oh, dear!"

"Mrs. Phelan," said a deep mellifluous voice on the wire, "this is Swami Yogadevi."

"Oh — oh, Swami!" The old lady sighed with relief. "Oh, I am *so* glad to hear from you!"

"Dear Mrs. Phelan, you are in trouble. I know. I could feel the disturbance in your aura."

"Oh, Swami! If you only knew. . . . I — it's my mining stock, Swami. The stock you said I should buy, remember? And now —"

"He wants to buy it back from you. Yes."

"He . . . does . . . ? Oh, then it's all right . . ."

"Sell, Mrs. Phelan. But for a profit, of course."

"But how much should I —"

"Not a penny less than seventy thousand, Mrs. Phelan. No, not a penny less — and only in cash, Mrs. Phelan. Peace be with you. Your star is in the ascendant. You will not say that I have talked to you, naturally. Goodbye."

When Mr. Melville Rochborne heard the price, he barely escaped being the first recorded case of human spontaneous combustion.

"But Mrs. Phelan . . . I've just told you. The stock is no — well, it's been misrepresented. It's not really worth the price you paid me. I thought if I gave you your money back . . ."

"The stars," said Mrs. Phelan raptly, "control my business dealings. I am asking seventy thousand for the stock."

"Oh, sure, the stars." Mr. Rochborne thought rapidly. "May I use your telephone?"

He dialed a certain unlisted number for nearly five minutes, with the same negative results that had rewarded him even before he called at Mrs. Phelan's house. At the end of that time he returned, slightly frantic and flushed of face.

"Mrs. Phelan," he said. "We can discuss this, I know. Suppose we say fifty-five thousand."

"Seventy, Mr. Rochborne," said Mrs. Phelan.

"Sixty-two fifty," cozened Rochborne, in pleading tones.

"Seventy," repeated the implacable old lady.

Mr. Rochborne thought fleetingly of the mayhem he was going to perform upon the luckless frame of Reuben Haggitt when he caught him.

"Very well," he groaned. "I'll write you a check."

"My Swami told me all deals should be in cash," said Mrs. Phelan brightly. "I'll get the stock and go with you to the bank."

An hour later, minus practically his entire bank roll but grimly triumphant, with the stock of the Lucky Nugget mine in his pocket, Mr. Melville Rochborne met Mr. Reuben Haggitt on the doorstep of the apartment house on Russian Hill, and finally could speak his mind.

"You stupid worthless jerk!" he exploded. "What's the idea of being out all day — and on a day like this? You just cost us twenty-five grand!"

"Listen," shrilled the prophet, "who's calling who a jerk! What *did* you do about that mine?"

"I got it back, of course," Rochborne told him shortwindedly. "Even though the old bag took me for twenty-five G's more than she put into it — just because you weren't around to cool her down. But I didn't dare take a chance on waiting. There were some oldtime prospectors around, and if any of them recognized the carnotite ——"

"The what?" Haggitt asked.

"Carnotite — that's what uranium comes from. The Lucky Nugget is full of it. You know what that's worth today. If any of those miners spotted it and the story was in the papers tomorrow morning, you couldn't buy that stock for a million dollars. . . . It was The Saint, of course," Mr. Rochborne explained, becoming even more incoherent, "and he was trying to put over the most amateurish job of mine-salting I ever saw; but when he reads about this —"

The Swami was staring at him in a most unspiritual way.

"Just a minute, Mel," he said. "Are you drunk, or what? First you send me a wire and tell me to meet you at the airport. I watch all the planes come in until my ears are buzzing. Then you send me another wire there about some new buyer for the Lucky Nugget, and tell me to phone the Phelan dame and tell her to hold out for seventy grand in cold cash —"

A horrible presentiment crawled over Mr. Rochborne.

"What are you talking about?" he asked weakly. "I never sent you —"

"I've got 'em right here in my pocket." His colleague's voice was harsh, edged with suspicion.

"Ohmigod," breathed Mr. Melville Rochborne. "He couldn't have salted it *twice* . . . he couldn't have . . ."

It was Simon Templar's perpetual regret that he was seldom able to overhear these conversations. But perhaps that would have made his life too perfect to be borne.

*Joseph Shearing is best-known as the author of a series of remarkable novels, each based on a relatively obscure* cause célèbre *in the annals of French and English crime. Joseph Shearing's work in this field has stamped the author as one of the most distinguished criminologists of our time. Such experts as Edmund Pearson and William Roughead have publicly hailed the Shearing studies-in-murder as the finest of their kind being published today. Sally Benson, reviewing* THE CRIME OF LAURA SARELLE *in "The New Yorker," wrote words of praise seldom accorded a practitioner in the genre of crime: "Mr. Shearing is a painstaking researcher, a superb writer, a careful technician and a master of horror. There is no one else quite like him."*

*Shearing shorts — an allusive alliteration — are virtually unknown in America. The one we have selected for Mr. Shearing's first appearance in EQMM is the story of Mary Fryer, a wealthy old maid of dominating personality, a woman who has adjusted her life even to the point of subjugating a secret passion. You may marvel at how a man could have attained so clear an insight into a woman's character — until you realize that "Joseph Shearing" is a pseudonym, that the author is really a woman. Only a few years ago Mrs. Gabrielle Margaret Vere Campbell Long (also known as "Marjorie Bowen") confessed to the authorship of the "Joseph Shearing" novels.*

# LOVE-IN-A-MIST

*by JOSEPH SHEARING*

MARY FRYER made three entries in her commonplace book: *Item; to speak to Agatha about her high heels. Item; to have the old bridge in Croom Wood repaired. Item; to replenish the beds below the terrace with Queen Anne's Lace and Nigella* (*Love-in-a-Mist*).

None of these things was of much importance, but Miss Fryer was a very methodical woman and it worried her when some trifle slipped from her keen memory only to re-occur at some inopportune moment. When she had last been in Croom Wood she had noticed that the wooden bridge across the steep water-break and rapid stream was rotting and, in fact, quite dangerous. But as it was very seldom used — Croom Wood was the loneliest part of her estate — she had forgotten about it until John Portis, the underkeeper, had reminded her of it yesterday.

Then, the flowers — that bed beneath the terrace — required, she

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thought, a blue color against the stone, not those hot-hued celosia the gardener put in year after year.

Agatha was one of the housemaids, and Miss Fryer, who kept many servants, did not often see her; but it was an acute, if occasional, irritation to hear the tap, tap of those high heels along the wide corridors. Miss Fryer had already spoken to the girl, who, however, continued the offense. There must be an end of that annoyance, Miss Fryer decided; she would herself buy for her a pair of comfortable flat-heeled, wide-toed shoes, summon the girl into her presence, then tell her she must wear them and not the foolish, uncomfortable French shoes which must have cost far more than she could possibly afford.

The acute mind of Mary Fryer made a connection between the bridge and the vanity of the housemaid. Agatha was one of the few people who went through Croom Wood, which was a short cut to her grandfather's farm at Lyston, and if she, foolish as she was, tried to cross the bridge instead of going round over the head of the water-break, it was quite feasible that she might catch one of those ridiculous heels in the broken planks and fall onto the stones below. The current was strong, deep, and swift, and no one would hear the cries or see the struggles of Agatha, for the spot was quite forsaken.

"I must warn the girl." Then Mary Fryer smiled. "I suppose that is why Portis reminded me of the bridge."

The underkeeper was going to marry Agatha in the winter. Miss Fryer had taken a great interest in the improving and garnishing of the cottage which the young couple would occupy. And the dressmaker at Lyston was making, at Miss Fryer's expense, a generous outfit for the bride.

This was not being done for the sake of the girl, who was treated with great coldness by her mistress and kept at the same distance as all the other servants, but because of Mary Fryer's concern with John Portis.

She shut up her commonplace book and locked it in her desk. A full day's work and leisure was before her, for the autumn morning had just begun. It was a pleasure to her to sit in the handsome, gracious room and look out through the long French windows on to the well-kept, carefully cherished gardens with park, meadows, and fields beyond — all belonging to Mary Fryer. She was a happy woman. It did not trouble her that she had missed husband and children, that she was fifty years old and had never been either beautiful or charming. She owned Fryer's Manor, she was in her proper place, part of a satisfying continuity; she relished, with a keen zest, every detail of her life, she enjoyed her pride of place, her talent for management, the great respect everyone gave her, the comforts and luxuries she could afford to give herself. She continually rejoiced in her possessions, from the rich Manor itself to the least of her frail Worcester tea cups; she was healthy, strong-minded, and had never known a regret.

Without blenching she contemplated, every time she went to church (and on no reasonable occasion was her impressing pew empty), the graves of her ancestors and the place where she would lie herself. These dead Fryers were all living to her; their portraits were on her walls, their names and stories in her heart and often on her lips. She rather believed that if you were a Fryer of Fryer Manor, it did not much matter if you were alive or dead.

In the same spirit of placid and generous pride she regarded her heir, a younger sister's son; everything would be his with the one proviso — that he took the name of Fryer.

She carefully altered the date on the calendar — *September 1st, 1861.* September, a delicious month; she looked forward to days and days of delight, to years and years of enjoyment, for she was so strong, healthy, and equable in her temperament — yes, she was sure that she would relish life to the last minute of it, as she relished her father's good port to the last drop on the tongue.

She was in a mellow mood and counted her blessings. How fortunate it was that she had always been able to indulge her sense of power, over servants, tenants, villagers, over the vicar and curate, over nearly all her friends and acquaintances. She was just, benevolent, and impartial, but she would have loathed to have been an underling. Even now she sometimes felt that her great capacity for command, for courage, for quick decision, for all the qualities of leadership, had not been fully used. A crisis — that now — she would really rather like to be faced with a crisis, just to show herself what she could do.

"How absurd I am being. As if anything like that would happen to me! And what a bother if it did! Now, what have I to do this morning? Four letters to write, three visits to make ——" She rose and opened the window, allowing the uninterrupted sunshine to fall over the handsome furniture, the rich carpets, the spotless silver, and all the other evidences of long established wealth and decorum.

Mary Fryer was a short woman with an aquiline nose and slightly prominent gray eyes; her complexion was very good and she had pretty hands. She wore a frilled dress of gray bombazine; her hair was the color of hay, very smoothly dressed in a net of black chenille. At her waist hung a multitude of small keys (the large keys she carried in a flat basket) and in her close-buttoned bodice was her father's gold watch on a thick gold chain, which passed several times round her neck.

As she stood there, in the house where she had been born and where she would die, looking over the land that seemed part of herself — as if she had been actually moulded from the warm earth — this little woman thrilled to a sense of her own power — a power over others and, more triumphant still, power over herself.

In this matter of love, for instance,

she had won a notable victory. In her youth she had coolly decided to marry no man unless he came up to her secret standard of what her husband should be. Not having found her ideal she was quite content to leave that aspect of life alone. And then, when, too late, she had met the man who would in every particular have satisfied her, she had been able to regard the situation with ironic amusement, able not to betray herself by a sign, able to preserve her happiness unblemished.

A timid tap at the door brought her out of her self-satisfied musing.

"Come in."

It was Agatha who entered. One glance at her showed Miss Fryer that the girl was in the deepest distress.

"What is the matter, Agatha? Come into the room, child, if you please, and sit down."

Miss Fryer closed the window and returned to her seat by the desk. The girl obeyed and took the high, stiff chair with the white and black head-embroidery.

"A chance to tell her about her heels," thought Miss Fryer, but, as usual, kindly and reasonable, she waited for Agatha to speak. And while she waited looked at the girl with that poignant gaze she turned on her whenever she saw her, which was not often.

Agatha Lerder was eighteen years old with not very good features and a common, silly air. But she had the bright coloring, the starry eyes, the red lips, and the abundant fair hair which in her class passes for prettiness. She was easily excited and could be very pert and rude, but she was also good-natured and gentle.

Miss Fryer despised her with an intensity of contempt that often surprised herself.

"Well, Agatha, what is it?" she asked very pleasantly. "You look quite ill. It must be something serious, surely, for you to have disturbed me in the middle of the morning."

Agatha did not reply; she sat slack and helpless, twisting the buttons on the cuffs of her lilac-sprigged gown; her face was blotched pink and white and her hazel eyes bulged like the eyes of a rabbit Miss Fryer had once seen caught in a trap.

And then, suddenly, terror gave a fixity to Miss Fryer's serene gaze.

"Not — some accident — with Portis? A gun ——"

"No, ma'am. *He's* all right."

"Well, then," said Miss Fryer rather sharply, "tell me please, what *is* the matter. I am busy."

The girl's face puckered up. She began to weep.

Miss Fryer felt the keenest contempt for her in the world, that of an intelligent woman for a silly one, when it is softened by neither chivalry nor humor.

"Please stop crying, Agatha. If you upset yourself like that you will not be able to tell me anything, and I suppose that you wish me to help you? Very well, then. Now, you see I am calm. You want to confess something?"

Agatha nodded.

"Don't pull like that at your cuffs. You have broken something? Spoiled something?" As Agatha continued to sob Miss Fryer added: "I hope that you haven't *stolen* anything?"

"It's not as important as that to you, ma'am," whispered Agatha, writhing. "I haven't touched anything of yours. It's — the twenty-five pounds — that John gave me — his savings."

"I see. The savings of John Portis. And he gave them to you, like a fool, to buy some things for your house. And you spent them, these savings, on finery in Hereford, I suppose?"

"No. It's worse than that — ma'am."

"Worse?"

The fair head sunk lower and lower, the pretty, hot, swollen lips stammered out:

"I gave — it — to Ted — he gambled it away, market day."

"Ted? Who is he? You haven't got a brother, have you? I don't know very much about you, really. Please speak clearly."

"Oh, Miss! How am I to make it clear! It's Ted Branston, what used to be the carter here ——"

"But I dismissed him for drunkenness. He is a good-for-nothing!"

"So they call him — but I ——"

"Yes, you? — look at me, Agatha!"

The girl, timidly, yet not daring to refuse, raised her tear-sodden face, which quivered with terror at the sight of those pale, prominent eyes turned on her with so implacable a stare.

"Oh, ma'am! I'm a wicked, wicked girl! There's no hope for me, that I well know. He had the money out of me afore I knew, his talk so tender and his ways so sweet ——"

"Did he have anything from you beside the money?" Miss Fryer was caressing her watch-chain with quick movements; her gaze fell to the girl's high, silly heels . . . pretty shoes, pretty feet, though.

"I used to meet him in Croom Wood. He's not a man to respect a girl — like John. He used to frighten me, too. I gave him the money to go for a sailor — I hoped it would never be found out. But it will. I can't go on. I feel ill, oh, so sick, Miss ——"

"Stop, please, Agatha. What are you trying to tell me?"

"Oh, I haven't the courage to tell you! If you was a married lady ——"

"I think that I understand, even if I am an old maid, Agatha. You are going to marry John Portis, but you are going to have Ted Branston's baby, and you gave John's money to Ted. And now he is asking about the money and perhaps wondering why you aren't well — and you are frightened, eh?"

Agatha passionately wept.

"Stop crying! How am I to help you if you make yourself ill? What do you exactly want?"

"The money. I'd work my fingers to the bone to repay ——"

"Never mind that. You want twenty-five pounds. What else?"

"If I could be hidden somewhere — if you could think of something. I

don't know much about it — I'm scared!"

"I see. You want to deceive Portis. You intend to marry him, just the same."

"It 'ud break his heart if he knew."

"He — loves you — so much?"

"He's fair set on me. Different from the way Ted was — if he were to find out he'd fair kill me ——"

"And the other man — this drunken carter — what are your feelings there, Agatha?"

"I don't care for him no more."

"I see." Miss Fryer continued to play with her watch-chain. "And Portis — do you *care* for him?"

"He's a good man," sobbed Agatha.

"Be quiet. You'll be heard outside the door. Now listen, Agatha. I don't pretend to be concerned much with you. I've met so many girls like you. Natural sluts! But John Portis is a good servant, I value him very highly. I intend to promote him. I've been kind to you because of him."

"I know, that is why I came to you — because of what you think of John, ma'am."

Miss Fryer's hand paused on her chain; she thought that she detected a fleeting look of cunning on the pretty, distorted face.

"I see. Well, I could help you quite easily, Agatha. The money is no more than I intended to give you as a wedding present. And I could think of quite a good excuse to take you away, or to send you away. No one would suspect me of anything like that. You would be quite safe."

"Oh, Miss! I couldn't ever thank you — it 'ud be life to me!"

"Don't thank me yet. I don't know if I shall do it. I don't know if it would be right. John Portis is far more important than you are, and I don't know if it would be fair to him. I must think it out."

Agatha again began to weep and implore. Miss Fryer checked her by rising. And instinctively the servant also rose.

"Don't bother me any more. I quite realize the necessity for a quick decision. And it doesn't take me long to make up my mind."

"Oh, you wouldn't be cruel, Miss! You are so charitable!"

"No, I don't think so. I'll tell you this evening exactly what I shall do. Now, control yourself — go upstairs and lie down. I shall tell everyone you have a little chill."

"It's my half-day, ma'am. Granny 'ud think it queer if I didn't turn up."

"Very well. But rest till then."

Agatha, rubbing her face with a large, coarse white handkerchief, turned to leave; Miss Fryer stopped her at the door.

"Portis — doesn't suspect?"

The girl's tears gushed anew.

"Oh, God! I hope not! But he seemed queer like, yesterday ——"

"Well, leave it to me. And stop crying, you poor little fool."

The heavy door closed on Agatha. Miss Fryer was alone with the greatest problem of her life. It was this: Would the happiness of John Portis be best served by allowing him to marry

the woman whom he so passionately loved, or by revealing to him the trash that she was? The happiness of John Portis was Mary Fryer's sole concern in this business; for the girl she cared not one jot.

But he — he was the man whom she would have loved, if he had been a gentleman and if he had been her own age. She had known that when he had first come from Ross five years ago and she had employed him on her estate. Recognized the fact with irony, without regret, even with pleasure in the realization that the world did contain one such man as she had dreamed of in her youth.

But — the son of a small farmer and twenty years her junior. She had not betrayed herself by a flick of an eyelid, not sacrificed her justice, her serenity, her dignity by an iota. The man had not been unduly favored nor rewarded — she was generous with all her servants. She had been glad of his happiness with Agatha; that she regarded tenderly, like a mother watching a child absorbed in the delight of a cheap, silly toy that to him is beautiful and necessary. Nor did her secret passion trouble her content. She often faced it squarely with good humor and irony; she would not name it love — Mary Fryer could not love a man in her employ — but she admitted: "If it had been different I *should* have loved him." And looking at her beds of nigella she would think that their country name suited her emotion. Love-in-a-mist! Not clear, warm, radiant, but shining through other emotions that beautified and dimmed. A mist, like that which sets aside the world from the sun and from reality.

But there were no gracious veils about her passion now as she turned over Agatha's confession in her alert mind. She was astonished at the heat and fury of her protective love for the man, her bitter scorn of the girl. She had felt no jealousy when he had chosen the soft, fondling fool, but now she regarded with hatred the false, cowardly, selfish, stupid slut who had contrived to entangle John Portis.

"A man like that!"

Her pale glance crept to the stiff painted faces of her ancestors in the portraits on the walls, as if she asked advice from their embattled presences. A Fryer ought to know what to do. But for the first time in her life she felt at a loss.

Would he rather be deceived or enlightened?

She knew well enough, from instinct and close, furtive observation, how he doted on the wretched creature. Should she, as she so easily could, help the girl to appear what he thought her? Leave him to find out gradually, when his own passion was spent, what bad fruit he had plucked? Or perhaps never find out at all. Agatha might be frightened into future honesty or she might be cunning enough to deceive him forever.

Or should she, Mary Fryer, tell him the truth, watch him through his rage and grief, and then richly compensate his disappointment?

She did not allow it to interfere with her habits; the sunny day proceeded as usual, leisurely, well-ordered; she had her good meal and drank two glasses of port instead of one, she wrote her letters and paid her visits in the village.

And at the back of her mind the question — "What shall I do?" — lay perpetually coiled.

As she returned from the village about four o'clock, she saw Agatha in a black-and-white plaid shawl and black straw bonnet leaving the Manor garden by the servants' entrance and walking, heavily, towards Croom Wood.

"She looks quite calm," thought Miss Fryer. "I suppose she is trusting my womanly pity. How little she guesses!"

But then Mary Fryer remembered that fleeting look of understanding across the girl's face, as if she *had* guessed. "But it is impossible. She is a fool. And I haven't given myself away. I never told her about those high heels, after all. I ought to. It is doubly dangerous in her condition. I suppose, if I tell him, she will drown herself — or something of that kind. That wouldn't matter at all."

Miss Fryer went into her parlor and sat down without taking off brown silk shawl and the close little hat with the russet ostrich tip and veil that fitted so neatly to her close, smooth chignon. She was always very careful of appearances; even this afternoon, in her great absorption, she had selected a pair of fresh kid gloves; she like to see them on her small hands. She felt very restless and full of energy, ready to undertake any prodigious action for the sake of John Portis. She was much excited to realize how strong her passion was, how bold, resolute and daring it made her — but, what to do?

Certainly she could not stay in the house; she would go for another walk, away from the village, away from everyone.

She took up her reticule and her parasol and went out from the afternoon hush of the house into the sunny loveliness of the park.

Mary Fryer turned where there were no horizons — into the woods. She was veering towards her decision — not to tell. Her painful and passionate concentration on the case had evolved this judgment: that he would prefer any future disaster to that of being cheated of his present felicity.

Miss Fryer walked quickly, absorbed in plans for helping Agatha, for preserving intact John Portis's illusion of happiness; her mind worked busily over all the details and she did not notice where she was going until a sound of water disturbed her and she realized that she was in Croom Wood.

She was pleased that she had, as it were, come naturally into this solitude where she was not likely to be disturbed. A space of harsh bracken, deep tresses of broken weeds, and long brambles with withered leaves and green berries spread between spare, high pines that quite shut out the up-

per air; there was rising ground on either hand and the sound of water falling on stones. She could just see the bridge as she ascended the hilly path.

"I must remember those repairs — I mustn't let *this* interfere with my duties."

Then she stood still, listening. There was another sound beside that of the tumbling water. Something being dragged — a village child stealing an old, dry bough, perhaps. She strained her ears, which were a little stunned by the incessant roar of the water, and walking forward through the bracken almost stumbled on a spade resting against one of the straight, fine trunks.

She concentrated on this for a moment, frowning, wondering, considering; when she looked round suddenly and saw John Portis a few paces away, he was absorbed in the task of dragging along the body of Agatha.

Miss Fryer knew at once the black-and-white check shawl, the black chip straw bonnet. He had not seen her and she could have easily fled, but she never thought of doing so. Her whole being veered towards and settled on this brutal solution of a problem with which she need no longer concern herself; she felt lifted up, out of herself.

"John Portis."

The man turned, at once alert and cautious, as if his attendant devil had spoken.

She went towards him.

"There has been an accident."

He straightened himself; Agatha, looking very small, lay at his feet; one of her shoes had come off.

Mary Fryer looked at the young man and smiled; faced by this complete understanding he said:

"I waited for her. She always came this way to Lyston."

"You knew?"

"I suspected. When I faced her with it she couldn't deny it. A dirty drab! Begging your pardon, Miss Fryer."

"I don't mind. It is true. She told me."

"I swore last night I'd do it — if it were true. I don't mind swinging."

"Why should you be — punished — for an accident?"

"An accident? I ——"

He broke off and they both stared down at Agatha. The girl had been strangled; everything was hideous about her except the long, loose fair locks that fell out of her crushed bonnet.

"Why did you fetch the spade, Portis?"

"I ran back for it to the woodman's hut — I was taking her to where there's space enough — and the ground not so hard."

"That is all foolish. The bridge is broken and she would wear those high-heeled shoes. How natural for her to fall into the stream! No one would enquire further than that ——"

The man's rigid face became full of light and energy; it was like a mask coming to life. "My God! — I never thought of that!"

"Cover up her eyes, Portis — they

tell too much. Though I dare say by the time she's been dashed from one rock to another ——"

Miss Fryer dropped her clean, fragrant handkerchief and walked ahead without looking back, towards the broken bridge. She heard him busy with his burden, behind; she wondered if his will or her own was animating him.

She went on to the bridge and still she did not look at what he was about, but broke away some of the rotten wooden railings and kicked some pieces of the powdering planks and cast them down into the powerful stream.

"Now they will see that these are fresh marks ——" She looked below and saw the check shawl, black bonnet, far down the glistening rocks. He was adroit and powerful. She descended from the frail bridge and picked her way to where he stood dumb on the edge of the swift waterfall, gazing after his victim. He was strong, ruthless, magnificent as the roaring water itself; her pale glance caressed every line and hue of his vigorous manhood.

"You have disturbed some bracken and boughs. You will be able to put that right? And put that spade back. *Quickly!*"

He turned to stare at her and her love was perfected by his complete absence of subserviency.

"Why did you do it, ma'am? I didn't mind taking the penalty. It was because of the flies I was going to bury her — not to hide it."

"Yet you were glad of my suggestion?"

"Yes. It seemed an escape — but I don't know."

"I do. This ends everything. She won't be disgraced either."

"It seems better like this. The law don't touch a thing like this either, does it, ma'am?"

"No, I don't think so."

"You see, she was mine. Do what I liked with. If it were any but that filthy carter — spending my money, too — and here, in this wood — where we used to meet — he and she — again asking your pardon, ma'am."

"You needn't, I thought of it too. And wondered, too. I don't understand these women who are just animals."

His handsome face settled into woe. "Why couldn't she like me?"

"She was a fool, Portis. We had better go."

He trudged heavily beside her until they reached the path; out of sight of the stream and what the tumbling waters played with. . . .

"This is *my* land, Portis. I have the right to decide for you — you are in my employ. I feel that *you* are *mine*, to do what I like with." Miss Fryer was rather breathless. "I suppose you would prefer to get away — from Croom Wood? I could find you work with a friend of mine in Dorset."

"Thank you, ma'am, that would be better," he replied absently.

She touched his corduroy sleeve and asked very delicately: "How do you feel, Portis?"

"Numb. As if my heart and all the feeling in it had been cut out of my body."

"It's good — after all the — pain. You'll come to life again. There are other women. I'll look after you, as long as you like."

He peered at her blankly.

"Why, ma'am?"

"You are a good servant. I have no fault to find with you." She looked curiously at the strong hands that now hung slackly by his side, but that had, a little while before, crushed the life out of Agatha; and she smiled again. "Goodbye! Do not forget the spade. Remember to be careful. And you must live — and forget."

He touched his forelock mechanically and turned away. She watched him fetch the spade, return to the path, and disappear up the rising ground; she felt that her will, not his, was doing this.

There was still something for her to do. That other shoe. . . . She searched for it, found it, returned to the bridge and threw it over into the water. Silly, cheap, high-heeled shoe — she had never before touched an intimate article belonging to a servant. She was sorry she had given him the handkerchief; but even if it were found, she could explain it away. . . .

Miss Fryer returned home; she had a great sense of ease, of liberation, as if life had reached a climax, as if she had fulfilled an imperative need; she had not failed herself.

The first fire burned on the spacious hearth; there was a delicious smell of pastry, of roast meat — preparing for her dinner; her nostrils expanded with relish; she drank two glasses of sherry from the heavy decanter on the sideboard.

Would he be able to carry it through?

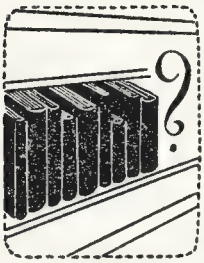
She trusted him. And for herself? There might, she supposed, be nights when she would dream of Croom Wood and what might be muttering and wailing there. There might be moments when she would wonder at herself and him. At present she felt exalted. She took off and threw into the fire her gloves soiled with powderings of dry wood; her pale eyes looked round at the protective faces of her ancestors. A Fryer would know what to do.

She had known — without hesitation or a single slip.

Now she was tired; she sank into her comfortable chair without removing her neat hat. Her mind, not functioning quite normally, reverted to the last three items in her commonplace book. She could put her pen through that relating to Agatha's high heels — the bridge would certainly be repaired now. Nor was she likely to forget the blue flowers, emblem of a veiled, an obscure passion — Love-in-a-Mist.

She smiled in triumph. How completely he had accepted her help — without question, or thanks. She had been right; he was the man whom she ought to have married.

# CRÈME DE LA CRIME



*John Dickson Carr and his family have come over from England and settled permanently in the United States, and John is now a member-in-best-standing of the MWA (Mystery Writers of America, Inc.). The Carrs live in Westchester County, about three miles from where your Editor hangs his hat and homebrews his homicides. In the old days John and your Editor used to talk shop by long-distance correspondence; now we sit either in the Queen's parlor or in John's wonderful study, with its brick fireplace, its old swords and rapiers on the wall, and its deep, relaxing leather chairs of London tan. There is only one word to describe the Carr study: it is a clubroom, with all the peace and comfort the word implies. Well, one evening, in the midst of discussing locked rooms and miracle problems, your Editor got an idea. It was not a new idea, but it is one that has always been sure-fire. How about starting a department in EQMM called "Favorite Detective Stories of Famous Detective-Story Writers"? John mulled it over: it sounded good, but wouldn't the nominations always be stories too well-known for reprint? We admitted that danger, but why not test the idea on John himself? Suppose, John, that you fish into your memory and begin reeling off the detective short stories which have made the most lasting impression on you.*

*John agreed to this impromptu experiment in anthologizing. Having just finished a solid year's work on an authorized biography of Conan Doyle, his first thoughts leaped to Sherlock Holmes. Yes, a Holmes story would undoubtedly be among his all-time favorites. Let's see: "The Red-Headed League" — "Silver Blaze" — but no, John's final, all-things-considered choice would be "The Man With the Twisted Lip." Next, of course, Chesterton — who could omit Father Brown from any list of favorites? It would be a toss-up: "The Honour of Israel Gow" or "The Man in the Passage" — and after a moment's deliberation John pitched decisively for the latter. Then there would be Thomas Burke's "The Hands of Mr. Ottermole" — and Jacques Futrelle's "The Problem of Cell 13," about the Thinking Machine — both absolute "musts" to any aficionado worthy of the name. That makes four stories — shall I go on, asked John. By all means, we replied; perhaps one of the stories you'll suggest will be a "sleeper" — an unexpected 'tec treasure.*

*You could see John's mind grasshoppering from author to author. Melville Davisson Post? Of course! An Uncle Abner story — "The Doomdorf*

*Mystery"? No, not an Uncle Abner story, superlative as they are. On John's list it would have to be "The Great Cipher" from* MONSIEUR JONQUELLE *— the favorite Post story of S. S. Van Dine and Dr. Norbert Lederer, and so many other connoisseurs of the genre. Then — unqualifiedly — Anthony Berkeley's "The Avenging Chance." An E. C. Bentley story about Philip Trent? "The Genuine Tabard"? No, a marvellous story but only Englishmen can appreciate it fully. Let's hold off on Bentley for the moment. R. Austin Freeman? Naturally! Say, Dr. Thorndyke in "The Aluminium Dagger." And that unforgettable story by Brett Halliday, "Human Interest Stuff" — you just* can't *leave that one out!*

*How many does that make? Eight. Suppose we push on — make it an even ten. Let's see, now: a Carnacki story — yes, indeed. "The Thing Invisible" — there's your "sleeper"! Why, I'll bet that story has never been anthologized! True, John, but our old friend August Derleth, under the publishing name of Mycroft and Moran, brought out the first American edition of William Hope Hodgson's* CARNACKI THE GHOST-FINDER *last year, and the first story in the book is "The Thing Invisible."*

*Well, that proves it can't be done: any list of most memorable shorts is bound to be one classic after another, and all too well-known for reprint in EQMM. But your Editor was still not convinced. We reminded John that he had selected only nine stories. Finish out the golden ten, pick one more — perhaps that tenth story . . .*

*John's eyes opened wide. There was another story that popped brilliant-clear into his mind. Perhaps it is not one of the ten best detective short stories ever written, but it has powerful recommendations. Witty, polished, full of bluff and double-bluff, with a final twist when you think no further twist is even possible, and with a murder method in the opening plot sequence that is so ingenious and yet so startlingly simple —*

*We knew instinctively that the experiment had succeeded. We were on the brink of —*

*John announced: Ronald Knox's "The Motive."*

*And now we were sure. The tenth story in John Dickson Carr's list* was *a "sleeper"!*

*But suddenly a colossal doubt seized us. A list of John Dickson Carr's ten favorite detective short stories —* and no story by Poe? *A list of ten definitive favorites and no mention of "The Purloined Letter" or "The Murders in the Rue Morgue"? Can such things be?*

*John crushed the doubt with a mere wave of his hand. Why, of course, no story by Poe. The Father of the Detective Story and his still unsurpassed standard (G. K. Chesterton's phrase) are in a class by themselves. The Poe tales of ratiocination are above competitive listings. Any 'tec tyro knows* that! [*Q. exits, properly squelched*]

# THE MOTIVE

*by RONALD KNOX*

A CERTAIN amount of dust is good for a juryman's eyes. It prevents him going to sleep."

Sir Leonard Huntercombe is probably responsible for more scoundrels being at large than any other man in England. His references to the feelings of his client, to the long ordeal which a criminal prosecution involves, to the fallibility of witnesses, to those British liberties which we all enjoy only on the condition that everybody must be given the benefit of the doubt unless he is found with his hand in the till, are a subject of legitimate tedium and irreverent amusement to the reporters, who have heard it all before. But it still goes down with the jury, fresh to their job; and, after all, that is more important. It does not often happen to such a man that he is drawn into the old, old argument, whether a defending counsel is justified in pressing his defense when he privately knows his client to be guilty. And, of all places, you might have expected him to be free from such annoyances in the Senior Common Room of Simon Magus — the smoking-room, to be more accurate. Dons hate a scene, and prefer to talk trivialities after dinner. It is hardly even good form, nowadays, to talk a man's own shop to him. In these days of specialization we are all bored with each other's technicalities, and a tacit convention has grown up that we should stick to the weather and the Boat Race. Sir Leonard was justified, then, if his eye resembled that of a codfish rather more than usual.

For, as bad luck would have it, Penkridge was dining as somebody else's guest — Penkridge, the dramatic critic, to whom all the world is a stage, and everything, consequently, a fit subject for dramatic criticism. It takes less than the Simon Magus port (though that is a powerful affair) to make such a man as Penkridge boorishly argumentative. He had trailed his coat deliberately, with a forthcoming article in view, and had contrived to put Sir Leonard on his own defense almost before he knew it. I need hardly say that he was adopting the most Puritan view.

McBride, the philosopher, was the host of the great man; and he felt bound to interfere, partly from a sense of hospitality, and partly because he always likes to be desperately just. (Nobody, it has been said, has seen more points of view than McBride, or adopted less.) "I was just thinking," he said, "that perhaps you could put up an apology for Sir Leonard's point of view if you claim that Law should be regarded as one

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of the sciences. You see, it's notorious, isn't it — I think even Cowan here will agree with me — that science owes some of its greatest developments to the influence of theories which have proved quite false, but were suggestive nevertheless, and put people on the track of the truth. Isn't it arguable, I mean, in the same way, that my friend here is justified in putting forward a hypothesis, which will help forward the cause of truth if only by eliminating error?"

Penkridge, who hates dons, was evidently preparing to say something unpleasant; but Sir Leonard forestalled him by disowning the proffered help. "It's not a scientific mind you need in the legal profession," he insisted; "it's a kind of artistic gift. You've got to be imaginative; to throw yourself into the business of picturing the story happening as you want it to have happened; with your client innocent, of course. Probably, if we knew, we should find that the truth in many cases is even stranger than all our imaginings. But imagination is what you must have — did I ever tell you the story of a client of mine, a man by the name of Westmacott?"

Several voices demanded that the story should be told; better to have Sir Leonard being prosy, than Penkridge being unmannerly. And Sir Leonard, when his cigar was going, went ahead with the story.

"I first came across Westmacott," explained Sir Leonard, "over a business that never came into court, though it precious nearly did. I was only called in on a minor point to give counsel's opinion. He was a man in late middle age, with an unhealthy look about him, as if you wouldn't give him a very long life, and a depressed, restless sort of manner, as if his mind was preoccupied with something else than what he was talking about at the moment. He had done well on the Stock Exchange, and had retired just lately, with a considerable income he hardly knew what to do with. At least, it was a surprise to his friends when he went to stay over Christmas at one of those filthy great luxury hotels in Cornwall. It was the kind of place that tried to make you believe you were on the Riviera, with any amount of central heating and artificial sunlight, and a covered-in bathing-pool where the water was kept at a temperature of eighty or so, night and day. Of course, he might have gone to Cornwall for his health; but one didn't see why he should have gone to a place like that, because he was well known to be old-fashioned in his views and conservative in his opinions, whereas the Hotel Resplendent was all full of modern people, a cosmopolitan and rather Bohemian crowd. Among the rest there was a well-known literary man; he's still alive, and you'd all know his name, so I'll call him just Smith.

"I'm speaking of some years ago, you'll understand. Nowadays, of course, it doesn't matter what anybody writes, or what sort of opinions

he puts forward; it's all art. But at the time of which I'm speaking, there were still people going about who were capable of being shocked, and they were shocked by Smith. It wasn't so much his indecency, though every book he wrote looked as if it was meant to be seized by the police. He was really, if an old fogy like myself can be allowed to use such forgotten language, a bad influence on the young people; everybody admitted it, though already most people rather admired him for it. Westmacott had never met him before, and the other people in the hotel felt pretty certain that the two wouldn't hit it off. The curious thing is, they were wrong. Westmacott hadn't read any of Smith's stuff, it appeared; indeed, he read very little except detective stories, which he devoured at the rate of one a day. And — well, strange acquaintances do ripen, and ripen fast, in a god-forsaken place like the Hotel Resplendent.

"It was a bad season; money wasn't being thrown about that year as much as usual; and the management tried to make the best of the position by encouraging the guests to be a sort of family party, with any amount of 'olde-worlde' festivities. Naturally, they concentrated on Christmas Day; crackers and Christmas presents, and a synthetic boar's head, and a Yule-log specially imported from Sweden; and a set of waits who'd been in training under an opera expert for months past. By half-past ten the company — between twenty and thirty of them, when you'd counted out the invalids who'd gone to bed early, and the idiots who'd gone out in cars for no reason whatever — found themselves set down by the master of the revels to play 'blind man's buff.' This didn't go too well, especially as the great hall in which they played it was heated like a crematorium. It was Westmacott, people remembered afterwards, who made the suggestion you would have expected to come from anybody but Westmacott — that they should all go and play 'blind man's buff' in the swimming-bath.

"Well, they got some kick out of it after that. Westmacott didn't go in himself, but he hung about on the edge; as a matter of fact, it was only pretty strong swimmers who did go in, because the bath was a matter of twelve feet deep at the shallowest part, and there was nothing but a hand-rail to lug yourself out by. Smith and Westmacott got into an argument, Westmacott saying he didn't believe you could know what direction you were swimming in when you were blindfolded, and Smith (who was an exceptionally good swimmer himself) maintaining that it was perfectly easy, unless you'd got a bad sense of direction anyhow. It was nearly midnight when the party went away, and it seems that Smith and Westmacott stayed behind to settle their differences with a practical try-out and a bet; Smith was to swim ten lengths in the bath each way, touching the ends

every time, but never touching the sides. They were quite alone when Westmacott adjusted the handkerchief on his new friend's forehead, to make sure that everything was aboveboard.

"Well, Smith did his ten lengths each way, and by his own account made a good thing of it. As he swam he didn't bother to touch the handrail, which was rather high out of the water; but when he'd finished he naturally felt for it — *and it wasn't there!* He tore the handkerchief off his eyes, which wasn't too easy, and found the whole place was in the dark. The rail wasn't within his reach anywhere, and he tumbled to what must have happened. Somehow a goodish lot of water must have been let out of the bath while he wasn't looking; and there was nothing to do but go on swimming about until somebody came to put things right for him; or, alternatively, until the level of the water fell so much that he was able to stand on the bottom.

"Other things began to occur to him before long. For one thing, he knew, more or less, where it was that the water escaped when the bath was changed, and he knew that there was a considerable undertow when it happened. He found there was no undertow now, which meant that the water wasn't escaping any longer, and there was no chance of finding that he'd got into his depth. Also, he remembered that the swimming-bath was a long way from anywhere, and it wasn't very likely that he would be heard if he shouted. Also, he couldn't quite see how the water could have started emptying itself and then stopped, unless somebody was controlling it.

"Well, they say the devil looks after his own, and it so happened that the night watchman, whom they kept at the Hotel Resplendent (chiefly to keep out of the way when he wasn't wanted), had spotted that the water was running away, and mentioned it to somebody; a search was made, and Smith was pulled out of the water with a rope, none too soon for his peace of mind. Smith was positive, of course, that he had been the victim of a particularly cunning murderous attack. I say particularly cunning, because, once he had drowned, it would have been easy for Westmacott (he assumed Westmacott was the villain) to have let the water into the bath again; and all the world would have been left supposing that Smith had committed suicide — how else could a strong swimmer have drowned with a handrail in his reach all the time? It looked as if it was going to be a very nasty business, and what didn't make it any better was Westmacott's own explanation, made privately to his lawyers, that the whole thing was a joke, and he had been meaning to rescue Smith later on. Nothing, it was explained to him, is more difficult to predict than a jury's sense of humor. Enormous efforts were made to hush the thing up, chiefly by the hotel people, who thought it meant

the end of their business if they were involved in a scandal; I'm not sure they were right there, but, as I say, this happened some years ago. The difficulty of Smith's case was that there was no proving it was Westmacott who had tampered with the water apparatus (as a matter of fact, anybody could have done it), and it was that hitch that induced the police to let it go; and Smith to be content with a handsome compensation.

"Well, it was touch and go, and there was nothing I expected less than to find Westmacott, to all appearances a dull and unadventurous man, figuring in my line of business again. Though, as a matter of fact, the police had found out things about him which would have altered my opinion if I'd known about them. His man, fortunately for the police, had done time at an earlier stage in his career, and was all too ready to give them information. He assured them that a great change had come over his master within the last week or so before he went to the Resplendent; he had come home one morning looking like a man bowed down by some hideous secret anxiety, though up to then he had been in normally good spirits. He cursed the servants freely, he would start at shadows. He bought a revolver, which the police found in his rooms (he was a bachelor, I forgot to say); and although this only looked like self-defense, it was a more peculiar circumstance that, about the same time, he got hold of a drug (I forget the name of it now) which is deadly poison, and I'm not sure that he hadn't forged a doctor's certificate to get it.

"It was less than a week after the trouble had died down that a new character came on the scene: a character nobody liked, who had seen him. He was a seedy-looking fellow calling himself Robinson, who seemed very anxious to have an interview with Westmacott, for he made a great fuss with the servants when he called three times and found he was always out. It was the opinion of the servants that Robinson went about in disguise for no good end, but servants will always say that of anybody who wears dark spectacles. When the two did first meet, the servants weren't prepared to say, because Westmacott lived on one floor, and often let in his visitors himself. Anyhow, for a fortnight or so he was a familiar figure in the house, being seen several times coming in and out.

"Westmacott had the habit of going to stay with friends near Aberdeen about the New Year. This time, he went a little later than usual; and it was a considerable surprise to his man when he was given the order to reserve two first-class sleepers on the night train from King's Cross, one in the name of Westmacott, and another in the name of Robinson. It didn't look too good; you couldn't by any stretch of the imagination suppose that Robinson belonged to the same world as Westmacott and his

friends. In fact, if he hadn't been professionally shy of them, I think the man would have gone to the police about it; it looked so much as if Robinson had got a hold of some kind over Westmacott, and was following him about for fear of losing his tracks. Anyhow, nothing was done about it. Westmacott was a man who fussed about trains, and he was at the station, it seems, a full three-quarters of an hour before the train started; he was worried, apparently, about Robinson — asked the attendant once or twice whether he had shown up yet, and stood looking up and down the platform. As he did this, a telegram was brought to him which seemed to set his mind at rest; he shut himself up in his sleeper, and took no further notice, as far as could be ascertained. Robinson turned up with only two or three minutes to spare, and was bundled hurriedly into the sleeper next door. Whether the two held any conversation was not known; the two sleepers communicated with one another in the ordinary way, and it was only a matter of slipping a bolt for either to enter the other's compartment.

"Robinson, it appeared, was not traveling all the way to Aberdeen; he was to get off at Dundee. The man was to come and call him about three-quarters of an hour before the train got in there. As a matter of fact, he cannot have slept too well, or possibly the lights and the shouting at Edinburgh woke him; at any rate, he went along the corridor just about when they were passing Dalmeny, and spoke to the attendant, who asked whether the order to call him still stood. He said yes, he expected to drop off again for a bit, and he was a heavy sleeper. Indeed, when the attendant knocked at his door, there seemed to be no waking him, and it was locked. With many apologies, the man knocked up Westmacott, and asked his leave to try the communicating door between the two compartments. This, it proved, was locked on Westmacott's side, but not on Robinson's. The attendant went in, and found the carriage quite empty. The bed had been slept in; that is, somebody had lain down on it, there was no mistaking the fact. Robinson's luggage was still there; his watch was hanging by the bunk; a novel he had been reading lay on the floor close by; his boots were there, and his day clothes, not his pajamas.

"Well, there was all sorts of fuss and bother, as you can imagine. Westmacott, who seemed quite dazed by the news and unable to give any account of it, naturally got out at Dundee and put himself at the disposal of the police authorities. They did not like the look of the thing from the start. They had rung up Scotland Yard, and through some unwonted piece of efficiency had got on to the story of Smith and his experiences in the bath at the Resplendent. Exhaustive inquiries brought no news of Robinson being seen anywhere on the line; and there had been no stop, no slow-down,

even, between the time when the attendant saw him in the corridor and the time when his bed was found empty. The train, naturally, had been searched, but without result."

"But they must have found his body," someone suggested.

"No remains were found; but you have to consider the lie of the journey. Between Dalmeny and Thornton Junction, near which the attendant tried to wake Robinson, the train has to pass over the Forth Bridge. The one interval of time, therefore, during which it was impossible to account for Robinson's movements was an interval of time during which a body might, conceivably, have been got rid of without leaving any trace. To disappear, it would have to be weighted, no doubt. But the awkward fact emerged that Westmacott brought a very heavy bag with him into the train (the porter gave evidence of this), and it was completely empty when examined.

"As I say, I thought Westmacott had been lucky to get off so lightly in the Resplendent affair. I didn't at all like the look of his case when I was asked to plead for him. When I went to see him I found him all broken up and in tears. He told me a long story in which he confessed to the murder of Robinson. Robinson — it was the old story — had been blackmailing him; he had evidence that it was Westmacott who attempted the murder of Smith in Cornwall. I gathered that there were other secrets behind it all which Westmacott was not anxious to go into, but it was the fear of exposure over the Smith case that made him reluctant to bring in the police against the blackmailer. Robinson had insisted on following him when he went north, afraid that he was trying to escape to the Continent by way of Leith or Aberdeen. The knowledge that he was being shadowed like this was too much for him, and he determined to get rid of his persecutor. Arranging for him to travel in the next carriage, he waited till the train was past Dalmeny, then found his man asleep, and laid him out with a piece of lead, tied that and other weights onto him as he lay there, and threw him out of the window just as the train was crossing the Forth Bridge.

"Ordinarily, when a man charged with murder tells you he is guilty you can form a pretty good guess between the two obvious alternatives — either he is telling the truth or he ought to be in an asylum. Occasionally there is a third possibility, for which the present circumstances did not seem to leave any room: he may be inculpating himself to save somebody else. I tell you, I didn't know what to make of it. The whole story seemed wrong; Westmacott was not a strong man, and what would he have done if his man had not been asleep? The chances are enormously against most men sleeping soundly on a train.

"Now, what was I to do? I felt certain the man was not mad, and I have seen many lunatics in my time.

I did not, could not, believe he was really guilty. I put it to you whether, with those convictions in my mind, I was not really offering to serve the cause of truth when I urged him (as of course I did) to plead 'Not guilty.'

"He would have none of it — then. It was only a day or two later that I had an impassioned appeal to go and see him again. I found his mind entirely altered. He still stuck to his story that Robinson had been blackmailing him, but he professed to know nothing whatever about the disappearance: he thought Robinson must have either committed suicide or else staged a very clever disappearance with the sole intention of bringing him, Westmacott, to the dock. He implored me to save him from the gallows. This was too much for me; I couldn't undertake to plead for a man who didn't know from one day to the next whether he was guilty or not guilty, and gave such very lame explanations of his movements and his motives in either case. At last, when I had been at him some time, he told me a third story, which was quite different, and, as I believe, true. I shan't tell you what it was just yet. As I say, I thought, and think, it was true. But it was obvious to me from the first that it was a story you could not possibly serve up to a jury.

"There was another odd thing, which was that now, for reasons you will understand later, I did not know whether I wanted my man hanged or not. I don't know how some of you severe moralists would have formed your consciences in a situation like that. I thanked God I could fall back on a legal tradition, and I resolved that I would defend Westmacott, devoting myself single-heartedly to pointing out the weaknesses in the story, whatever it was, the prosecution would bring against him. And, gentlemen, I succeeded. I don't think I have ever had a tougher fight; there was any amount of prejudice against him among the public at large, and the jury, as usual, reflected it. But there was the solid fact that no body had been found; the open possibility that Robinson had made away with himself, or slipped off somehow when the train stopped. And, of course, the difficulty of throwing a body clear of the bridge. There was a mass of circumstantial evidence, but not a line of direct proof. Of course, you see what had happened."

McBride, who had been sitting with his head buried in his hands, lifted it slowly. "I expect I'm being a fool," he said, "but I don't believe there was any such person as Robinson. He was just Westmacott, wasn't he?"

"That's a theory to go on, at all events," admitted Sir Leonard, accepting the whisky-and-soda with which the suggestion was accompanied. "Let's hear your reasons for thinking that, and I'll put the difficulties."

"Well, as you've told the story, nobody ever saw the two men together. When Robinson was seen

going out of the house, it was supposed to be Westmacott who had let him in. At the station, there was nothing to prevent Westmacott getting out of his sleeper during that last quarter of an hour, going off somewhere, and putting on the Robinson disguise, picking up fresh luggage at the cloakroom, and so making his second appearance. He made sure that the attendant should see him at Dalmeny, because he wanted everybody to think that Robinson had been thrown overboard exactly at the Forth Bridge. There was no point in making the body disappear when all the circumstances would, in any case, point to murder — unless there was no body to disappear."

"Good for you, McBride; I like to hear a man put a case well. And now let me point out the difficulties. You've got to suppose that a man who has already labored under an awkward imputation of intended murder deliberately projects an *alter ego* — a sort of Mr. Hyde — for no better purpose than to get rid of his imaginary carcass, thereby letting himself in for a second dose of suspicion. That, having done so, he first of all pretends to his counsel that he is really a murderer, and then he withdraws it all and decides to plead 'Not guilty.' Can you give a coherent explanation?"

"The man was balmy," suggested Penkridge.

"Who isn't, up to a point? But there was certainly method in poor Westmacott's madness. Shall I tell you the story he told me?"

"We'll buy it!" agreed Penkridge.

"I wonder if you could have guessed it? If so, your guesswork would have had to start from the moment at which, if you remember, Westmacott suddenly came home one day a changed man, with the shadow of something over his life. You see, he had been feeling ill for some time. He had made an appointment with a specialist, and that specialist told him the worst he had been afraid of hearing. Not only were his days numbered, but he must look forward to months of increasing pain, during which, very probably, his reason would be affected. That is the whole story; the rest just flows from it.

"Westmacott hated pain, perhaps more than most of us. He was not capable of facing great endurance, whether in action or in suffering. It didn't take him long to realize that there was only one thing for him to do — to cut his life short by suicide. He went out and bought a revolver with the necessary ammunition. He shut himself up with it, and found that his hand was that of a physical coward; it would not pull the trigger. He tried long-distance methods, bought some poison, and tried to dose himself with it. Even here he had no better success. He realized, with self-loathing, that he was a man who could not take his own life.

"It is open to you to say, if you like, that something went wrong with his brain after that, but if he had the makings of a lunatic, his was the logic of lunacy. If he could not kill himself,

he must make somebody else do it for him. He had not the physique to embark on some arduous adventure: fighting, for example, or a difficult mountain climb. Bravoes cannot be hired nowadays. There was only one way he could think of inducing somebody else to kill him — *and that was to kill somebody else!* He must get himself condemned to the gallows.

"Well, as you see, he went about that in a painstaking way. He deliberately went and stayed at that appalling hotel because he knew that he would meet there the sort of people he most disliked. He found himself in luck; Smith was there, and Smith was a man who, in his view, would be all the better for extermination. Circumstances favored him, too, in showing him a way to achieve his end. With all that reading of detective stories, you see, he had become fantastically ingenious in his conceptions of crime. He laid a trap for his victim which would make it possible for him to effect the murder by merely turning a tap, and then turning it a second time. There would be no blood, no struggle, no circumstances of violence.

"As it was, something worse happened. By mere accident, the crime of murder reduced itself to that of attempted murder, and penal servitude was no use to him. Rather sheepishly, he had to try and pass it off as a joke; all he had gained was the assurance that when he was next accused of murder, people would be apt to believe it against him. He did not attempt a second murder, which might go as wrong as the first one had gone wrong. He brought Mr. Robinson into existence, and then hurried him out of existence in the way you have all heard; he had got what he wanted.

"And then, of course, the coward came out in him again, and the close prospect of the gallows frightened him more than the remote prospect of a painful death later on. He broke down, and told me the story as I have been telling it to you. And I saved him; but for the life of me I did not know whether I was doing him a benefit in trying to save him. I simply had to proceed by rule of thumb, and behave as a good advocate should."

"What became of him?" asked McBride.

"Fate stepped in, if you like to call it that. As he left the court, rather dazed with all he had gone through, he stumbled at the edge of the pavement in a crowded street, and a lorry was on the top of him before, I think, he knew what was happening. No, I saw it, and I am certain he didn't throw himself off the pavement. I don't believe he could have, either."

"There's just one comment your story suggests to me," objected Penkridge, bitter to the last. "I always thought a lawyer was not allowed to repeat the story told him in confidence by his client?"

"That is why I said that the great gift in the legal profession is imaginativeness. You see, I have been making it all up as I went along."

*As we sat down to prepare Thomas Walsh's "Getaway Money" for the printer, we suddenly realized that all we know about Mr. Walsh is his work. Of the man himself we know nothing. What kind of guy is he? And then it crossed our mind that there is one man in New York who knows. We picked up the 'phone and called Joseph T. Shaw . . . Tom Walsh? A salt-of-the-earth guy, said Captain Shaw. Yes, I've known Tom Walsh for twenty years — bought his first story when I was editor of "Black Mask" — saw him climb and climb until he is now a steady contributor to "Saturday Evening Post" and "Collier's" — you know, one of Tom Walsh's most outspoken admirers is Octavus Roy Cohen — something about his background? well, he used to be on the "Baltimore Sun" — yes, scratch a writer and you find a newspaperman — oh, he's a big man, stands higher than six feet and weighs more than two hundred, but he's a big man in other ways too — got the sweetest disposition of any man I ever knew, even-tempered, gentle, an understanding guy — yes, that's it: he understands people, he knows character, and that's the best equipment a writer can have . . . and how right the old maestro is: strength in characterization is the most precious literary possession a writer can have; it is the secret weapon in a writer's arsenal; it covers a multitude of sins.*

# GETAWAY MONEY

*by THOMAS WALSH*

PETE MAYO smiled politely with his thin pale lips. He said: "I guess you're topped again." He placed his cards on the table, spread them out carefully with his fingers, and drew in the pile of chips around them. Drake saw three aces, a queen, and a five.

Young Jimmy Harris had been the only one to stay. He bent forward his strained boyish face, with the eye hollows dark drawn, the mouth desperately narrow, nodding when he saw Pete Mayo's hand. He pushed the cards to Drake, looking dully at him. When he spoke his voice was tensed, shaky.

"I think it's your deal," he said.

The Limited clicked past a crossing, the metallic clatter of its wheels purring softly through the compartment with a rhythmic drowsiness. In the blue dusk outside Drake saw a small stone station blur by.

"Martinsville," Drake said. He looked at his watch. "We're due in at seven; twenty more minutes. The last hand for me, gentlemen."

"Then we'll make it big," Joe Madigan said jovially. He had a hearty

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voice, small merry eyes in a plump, very pale face. While he spoke he looked around the table at the players in turn; at Drake's lean tanned features, at Pete Mayo's expressionless white mask, at young Harris' twisted lipsmile. Neil Grant, next to Madigan, pushed a hand caressingly through his curly blond hair, smiled with his pretty mouth.

"But give me something good, Drake," he said. "You've won altogether too much. If I win this time I'll buy you something real nice, darling."

The girl on the end of the seat turned sullenly from the window. She said angrily: "I've sat here for five hours like a fool. I hope you've enjoyed yourself."

Neil Grant said: "Now, darling."

Drake shuffled, dealt the cards. Joe Madigan on his left took his five, tapped them three times on the table top. He prayed, his eyes rolling comically: "Come up, baby." He grinned at Drake as he said it, then spread the cards out slowly in his cupped hands, squinting at each revealed corner.

"It's open," he said. "Get in for the gravy, boys."

They all stayed around to Drake. He held three fours, an ace, a ten. He took two chips from his stack and flipped them to the table center, smiling at Joe Madigan. "You wanted it big," he said.

Neil Grant pursed his lips in a soft whistle; after a moment he threw his cards down, pushed back from the table.

Madigan's chunky face lost geniality. He growled: "Damn if you ain't putting the whip to me this trip. I'm staying."

Pete Mayo spoke in a low voice, metal hard without resonance. He said: "Bigger, Joe." His chips jiggled a little with the swinging of the car as he tossed them out.

Jimmy Harris grinned nervously. His eyes were wide, very dark in his face, as he met both raises.

"I'm kicking it," Drake said. He put out three chips.

Madigan stayed. Pete Mayo didn't raise again. His calm eyes were blank, remote.

Madigan drew three cards, Pete Mayo one, Jimmy Harris one. Drake picked up his hand again, considered, played one of the hunches he had been winning on all afternoon. He tossed the ten into the discard, held the ace as kicker, and drew one from the stack.

Madigan's face was jovial again. "Cost the boys two," he crowed. When he finished speaking the door to the corridor opened, and a very small, very lean man came in. His face was shrewd, wizened, holding beady black eyes like brightly painted dabs of china.

Drake glanced at him. "Last hand, Nicky. Be right with you."

The dried-apple face grinned cockily. "Oke," it answered. He came over with brisk movements and stood behind Drake's chair.

Pete Mayo's cold eyes were detached, blank. He took two chips from

his heap and placed five more beside them. He did not say anything.

Jimmy Harris drew in his lips and licked them with his tongue tip. His face was eager, glowing. "And five again," he said.

Drake looked at his hand. He saw the ace of hearts he had held, the three fours next, and he spread the cards a little to reveal the one on the end he had just drawn. It was the ace of diamonds. He felt Nicky's breath slightly hotter on his neck. He said: "Once more, gentlemen."

Joe Madigan slapped down his cards. "To hell with it," he grumbled. "You took me for three gees. That's enough." He looked dark and fretful puffing at his cigar.

Pete Mayo raised again, the boy raised, Drake raised. Joe Madigan said: "Damn if it ain't a pot," and leaned forward, his little eyes greedy on the soaring pile of chips. Neil Grant hummed, his hands in the pockets of his tweed suit, his face handsome, sardonic.

Pete Mayo bet steadily, young Harris began to call, Drake raised back. The boy wasn't so sure now; his face was drawn uncertainly, the eyes flicking in rapid panicky arcs from one to the other. When he met Mayo's last raise the space before him held a lone white chip.

Drake said: "I'm calling, Mayo."

Pete Mayo arched his penciled black brows, looked incredulous, and laid his cards down. He was holding an ace high straight.

Jimmy Harris laughed suddenly — a sharp sound that had the relief, the breaking from tension, of a sob. He cried: "But it's no good, Mayo. I've —" He stopped speaking, looked at the five spades he spread wide before him, then up to Drake's gray eyes without raising his head, without, Drake thought, breathing.

Drake nodded, looking disgusted. He pursed his lips and threw his hand irritably into the discards, pushed his seat back from the board. Behind him Nicky's mouth dropped. He began: "What in the hell did you —" with his voice getting louder on each word. Drake's glance moved coldly at him and he stopped, his eyes astounded.

Joe Madigan's plump face was pouting. "Not my luck to win that," he said sourly. "They took us this time, Neil."

He set his cigar on the rim of the board, bent to one side, and hoisted up a small leather portmanteau from the floor. A mass of papers on the top, removed, displayed a greenish edge of bills, massed in without order in overlapping heaps.

Neil Grant, his smile bright, facetious, said: "Mr. Money Man Madigan. Carries the cash with him. Some day, friend, that habit will get you taken."

"Safer than a bank," said Madigan. He leaned forward, his eyes hard, probing. "With this, Neil." Drake looked at a shoulder-holster inside the bookmaker's coat, saw a revolver butt black against worn leather. Madigan tapped it, grinned thinly. "They see papa first."

Pete Mayo piled his counters without speaking, looking down at them thoughtfully; when he got his money from Madigan he straightened his slim dapper body and said: "I'll be seeing you," to no one in particular.

Jimmy Harris stacked his chips and pushed them across to Madigan. He made extravagant motions with his hands, laughed buoyantly as he spoke.

"What a break I got! I figured Mayo for a straight on his one draw — I wasn't afraid of him. But Drake over here —" He grinned, looking up, mopped back his dark hair with one hand. "What did you have, anyway?"

Drake said, shrugging: "It doesn't matter."

Madigan finished paying off and clicked the leather bag shut. He grinned again, heartily, the hail fellow well met. "They better run right tomorrow, or little Joey will be down to getaway money."

He took a folded hundred dollar bill from his vest pocket, patted it, kissed it, put it back. "Four years that's been in the old sock. If the boys keep hitting me like they did these last few meetings, I'll be using it. What you got in the Derby, Drake?"

"Oh, yes," Neil Grant said. His eyes were sleepy, half closed, with the brown glitter narrowed in them. "You really owe us a tip after taking all our money." Smiling brightly, gaily, he smoothed down his hair with one careful hand. "You have a reputation, you know — the bookmaker's bane. Chicago Drake, the man of mystery. Strong, silent, and extremely fortunate. Do pass me the good word; I'll take Joe's money, as a friend."

"Sorry," Drake said. His tone was bland, withdrawn. "I don't know a thing."

Joe Madigan grinned, played with the handle of the brown leather bag. "I hope you're coming clean, Chicago. You took me for plenty last meeting. The boys are beginning to mark you down as no bargain. Me, I'd hate to take your money on a brewery nag."

Neil Grant said. "Oh, come on, Drake. A good word to a friend —"

Drake said, "Sorry," again, without displaying sorrow in his faintly smiling face. He bowed to the girl, waved a hand at the others, went out to the corridor behind Nicky's gnome-like form.

Two Pullmans up they entered another compartment, and before the door was closed behind them Nicky exploded. He barked: "What in the hell was the matter? Almost four grand on the board, a guy with a straight, a guy with a flush, and you —" Nicky choked, sputtered, looked at once bewildered and savage — "you with nothing at all in your mitt but a lousy full house. Why —"

Drake said: "He's Pop Harris' boy." He whistled over the bag, not looking at the little man. "I guess he was playin' with Pop's money, three grand of it."

Nicky nodded his head. "Pop Harris' boy," he said slowly. "So that's the why. Your old pal Pop — and the kid's his. I heard about the boy; he's

been tearin' things open since Pop died and he got the old man's little bit o' jack. That's —"

Drake growled: "Cut it out, I'm not giving anybody anything — not even Pop's kid. He had me beat, that's all. If I'd had the full I'd have pulled in the pot."

"Sure, sure." Nicky mimicked him with a distorted swagger, a bitter heartiness of tone. "Two aces don't count with three fours. I know. But if Mayo had the kid beat, I got a hunch Pete would have lost the pot anyway. Lost to a full."

Drake said: "Don't bet on hunches. You'd always lose."

Chicago Drake left his hotel room a little after eight that evening. He bought cigarettes at the stand downstairs, lit one at the gas flame before the counter, and crowded his way, with one shoulder hunched, through the press of people filling the lobby.

Out on the street he whistled a passing cab to the curb, got in, and gave the driver directions. Fifteen minutes later the taxi turned off the main road to a graveled lane lit by a string of colored bulbs, rumbled past a clump of trees to an open space hazily green with concealed lights. Drake got out and paid the driver.

High, sweet smelling stacks of hay flanked him as he went forward. On a building before him the word *Haystack* flicked on and off against a ramshackle wooden building that resembled too obviously a barn, with premeditated spots of rustic and quaint antiquity dotted across the worn board fronting. A smooth-faced man in evening clothes received him at the door and escorted him inside.

The air was warm, sweetish with the mixed odors of gin and liquors. It was dim over the tables, shadow hovered, with the only light a palish halo at the end of the long room, wherein a platinum blonde in a dark velvet dress moaned mournfully through the closing stanza of a torch song.

Drake threaded his way behind the waiter through a vague whiteness of tables, catching stray snatches of talk, a woman's low laugh. It was too dark for him to distinguish faces; but all around him colored evening gowns and starched shirt fronts blurred together in movements under the pink light that retreated confusedly into the shadows from the silver glitter of the singer's hair. Drake sat down and gave his order, lit a cigarette while he waited.

"My man's go-ooo-one." The orchestra surged suddenly up from under the blue cadences of the girl's voice, overpowered it, and crashed brassy notes in crescendo against walls and ceiling. The lights went on, very brightly.

Drake looked about him. Four tables away from him his eye caught the bright glitter of Neil Grant's hair, head turned from Drake as he applauded the singer. Jimmy Harris sat on his left, between him and the girl; he was smoking, a faint, absent frown on his brows. On the opposite side of the table Pete Mayo's cameo cold face

was remotely absorbed above the sleek small body; his glance crossed Drake with the barest perceptible widening of recognition. He made no other sign.

The waiter brought Drake's order and he began to eat. When he had finished the band was playing again, a swift syncopation of notes that twinkled rapidly under the saxophones' thin lament. Pete Mayo got up and went outside; Neil Grant and the girl left the table to dance. Drake wondered where Joe Madigan was as he arose and snaked a way through the dancers to where young Harris was sitting alone.

Drake nodded to his nod, looked narrowly at the boy over his cigarette end, noting the uncertain flexible curve of his mouth, the dark gleam of something unrevealed in his eyes. He said: "How are they coming, Jimmy?"

"So so." Jimmy Harris smiled twitchily, looked away. He tried to make his voice forceful, hearty. He didn't succeed. "Looking for something good in the big race tomorrow. Got anything, Drake?"

"Maybe I have," Drake said quietly. "If you want it, Jimmy —"

A small, squarely set man bumped aside a dancing couple, stopped at their table with a loud whoosh of expelled breath. His face was small, red, jolly. He said cheerfully: "Hello, Drake," and looked down at the boy with the same expression. "You Jimmy Harris?"

Blood faded from Harris' face, leaving it sheet-like. The dark something in his eyes flamed higher, spread. He made groping motions with his hand, started to get up, looked at Drake. He said: "Yes — yes," in a breathless, excited voice.

"Proctor," Drake said. He glanced up at him from the boy, puzzled. "What are you doing out here?"

The short man, still cheerful, jerked his head downward. "I guess he can tell you."

Jimmy Harris started to speak, choked, blurted out: "I didn't kill him. I went in there for something I forgot. When I —"

The short man said: "But you knew he was killed, Jimmy? Why didn't you call somebody? Why you didn't makes it kinda tough on you, Kid." He looked across the dance-floor and nodded to a burly man by the entrance. Then he said: "Get your hat."

"Wait a minute," Drake put in slowly. "What's the point? This isn't a game of charades, Proctor?"

Proctor looked down at him, little eyes bright. "Nope," he said. "Not charades. It's a game called bing bing and hot foot, Drake. Joe Madigan's it. He got tagged, knocked off, rolled down the chute. He's croaked."

"Joe Madigan!" Drake's incredulous voice matched his eyes, his wide mouth. "But — I played cards with him this afternoon, Proctor. When — What you picking up the boy for?"

Proctor explained, a little impatiently: "For questioning. They found Madigan's body in his compartment on the Limited half an hour after it

pulled in. When we went down to look things over the conductor and porter give us the names of the guys that were playin' with him. You, Neil Grant, Pete Mayo, the kid." His thumb flipped briefly to Jimmy Harris. "The conductor saw this lad coming out of Madigan's compartment as the train got in to the station. He said the kid's face was white as hell. He looked all upset." Proctor shrugged. "What would you figure it?"

Jimmy Harris cried desperately: "But I told you I forgot something — my cigarette case." His eyes were dark, terrified in the pallor of his face. He held his arm rigid on the table, half lifting him out of his chair. "When I went back to get it I saw him. I got scared. Maybe I didn't use my head. I thought if I told —"

Proctor said, his tone friendly: "I got nothing to do with that, brother. They won't hang you tonight. All I was told was bring you down for questioning. If I was you I'd come along peacefully."

Jimmy Harris nodded dully. He said: "All right." He got up, not looking at Drake, and walked over to the doorway. Proctor followed him. The burly man turned, flanking them carefully.

An instant later Pete Mayo came in by the door they had left, turning his head over his shoulder to watch. Then he faced about, marched precisely, with his small contained arrogance, across the room. He said to Drake: "What's the parade for?" in a tone faintly amused.

Drake's tanned face was surfacely casual, pleasant. His voice affable, he asked: "You don't know, Pete? Some little something. The boys played quoits with Joe Madigan. But Joe didn't duck. Maybe you know something?"

Pete Mayo stopped smiling; the grave cold mask dropped down over his face, leaving it carefully inexpressive. He stared at Drake, said: "You speaking English?"

Drake didn't answer, didn't look at Neil Grant and the girl when they came up. He pushed back his chair and crossed the dance-floor in crisp strides

Drake felt lonely and a little cold, thinking of Pop Harris. Old Pop! The best friend a man ever had. And his boy now up for murder. Pleasant, that.

The yellowish sheen of a taxi left its line near the road and rumbled to him. With one foot on the running-board, Drake said: "Police Headquarters. And step on it."

He got back to his room shortly past eleven. The radio was on, tuned loudly to an incoherent splutter of jazz. Before it Nicky was trying dance steps on the rug, with a cigarette in the corner of his mouth and his eyes wrinkled against the smoke. When he saw Drake's face he stopped, looked serious, shut off the radio with his small finger.

"Bad?" he asked. "I couldn't figure what you wanted in the phone call."

Drake sailed his hat to the bed

and lit a cigarette before speaking. His voice poured out rapidly, earnestly. "Joe Madigan's been murdered, Nicky. They picked up Jimmy Harris on suspicion. He owed Madigan eight thousand dollars in unpaid bets. I saw him at Headquarters and he admitted that to me. But the cops don't know about that yet."

Nicky said, wide mouthed. "Hey! Wait a minute! Joe Madigan croaked? Where, when?"

Drake explained, briefly. He went on: "Proctor let me see the boy at Headquarters. He says Grant and the girl left Madigan's compartment before he did, and that when he got to his seat three cars down he remembered he'd left his cigarette case on the table. Then he got out his bags, brushed up a little in the smoking compartment — five minutes altogether — and went back for it. Madigan was lying on the floor with blood all over the back of his head. It frightened him so much that he didn't tell anybody, but just sneaked out. He figured, too, the eight thousand might make it look bad for him."

Nicky stopped scowling, stopped prodding his thumb at some side teeth long enough to say: "So what?"

Drake's eyes were bitter, slitted; he moved his head impatiently, stared before him. After a while he said:

"Madigan carried money in that leather bag of his. A good bit of money. You and I knew that — so did every regular at the races — and that includes Mayo and Neil Grant. The bag was empty when they found Madigan. So he was killed for the money. An ordinary stick-up man wouldn't take Madigan on the train — it would be easier, safer to get him in town. Figure it like that — a job done without planning, for money. Harris was away five minutes; plenty long enough for anybody who had left before him to come back and knock over Madigan."

Nicky said. "I think you're hinting, boss."

Drake's smile was brief, grim. "Smart boy, Nicky. We got in at seven, too late for the money to be banked. So it's reasonable to suppose the killer still has the money somewhere around him."

"That means?" Nicky asked.

"That means," Drake said, "we search two rooms in this hotel. Neil Grant's and Mayo's — maybe Grant's girl, too."

Nicky grimaced. "Nice and easy. Just like that?"

Drake said: "Just like that."

He went to the phone on the table and jiggled the hook. He said: "Mr. Mayo's room, please." When the connection was made he listened to the long ring, perhaps twenty times before the operator cut in. "Sorry, sir. Your party does not answer."

Drake jerked impatience into his tone. "They're in, operator. They must be in. Sure you're ringing the right party? What room number are you trying?"

The operator said: "Yes, sir. Room nine-o-six. Mr. Mayo."

Drake said: "Thank you," and hung

up. He told Nicky: "Mayo's out; we'll try him first. Nine-o-six — that's Miss Carrigan's floor. Amorous Carrigan."

He grinned, rubbed his blunt chin with nicotined fingers, snapped them suddenly before him. "Not so tough to crash it if she's on duty. Nicky, you go down to the lobby and hang around the elevators. When you see Pete Mayo come in ring nine-o-six on the dot. Got that?"

"Nine-o-six," Nicky nodded. "Right." His face clouded a little. "I don't like it, boss. Suppose you find dough; how you gonna prove it was Madigan's? And this Mayo is tough. I hear a yarn he's a killer down from Detroit. Bad boy. If —"

Drake said contemptuously: "He's a little rat. As for the money — we plan from that when we find out where it is. If things break —" He stopped, shrugged, beckoned Nicky out to the corridor.

Several minutes later he left the elevator at the ninth floor, stepping into a small reception room ornately carpeted, with a small desk at one side behind which a stout woman of forty, with plump rosy cheeks, sat reading an evening paper.

Drake smiled widely, advancing. "Miss Carrigan," he cried, heartily. "Well, well, well! How are you?"

The floor clerk blinked surprisedly, took a moment to look coy. She squealed in a flutter of emotion: "But it's Mr. Drake! Oh, I'm so glad to see you! But I had hoped you'd be on my floor this time, too. I want to take care of my boys." She smiled archly.

Drake lied gallantly, shrewdly: "I hoped so, too. But they stuck me upstairs, on the twelfth.

"By the way, Miss Carrigan, Mr. Mayo isn't in, is he?" He smiled confidentially, bent closer. "We're going to play a little joke on Pete — Mr. Mayo. You know —" He waved his hand vaguely, smiling at her, winked one eye meaningly.

"I know it's against the rules, but if you could let me have the pass key to his room for just a few moments —"

Miss Carrigan looked doubtful, then wavered, surrendered, under the warmth of his smile.

Drake took the key not too quickly, contrived to look pleasant and good naturedly mysterious, and escaped into the corridor with a last meaning nod. Outside Mayo's room he looked at his watch. Half past eleven. If Mayo came home from the *Haystack* early —

The lock yielded easily, without sound. He groped for the switch on the wall, found it, and light swooped at a click after instantly banished darkness.

He went first to the closet door and yanked it open, pulling forth the two dark leather traveling bags it contained. They were unlocked, half empty, and he thumbed rapidly through the contents. There was nothing interesting.

He drew out the dresser drawers, tossing aside shirts, underwear, handkerchiefs. He found nothing. There was a bathroom at one side and he

crossed to this and went in. Behind the mirror the white metal cabinet contained the usual toilet things. Nothing else. Drake fingered them irritably, flipped through the Turkish towels on the rack, and turned back. Two paces out he stopped.

Pete Mayo was in the bedroom, with his small, well-tailored back against the closed corridor door. He was dressed in a tuxedo, with a black banded straw hat on his head. He was frowning a little — a very tiny brow contraction of puzzlement. There was a revolver in his right hand. He said to Drake: "Sit down."

Drake shrugged, feeling like a petty thief, started to speak as the phone on the bedside table tinkled out over his words. Watching him, Pete Mayo stepped the two paces to it. He said: "Hello," in his hard, recognizable voice when his left hand brought it up to his lips.

Drake heard a staccato mutter from the other end. Nicky, of course. What in hell had kept him? Now . . .

Pete Mayo put down the receiver without saying anything else. His palely abstracted eyes glided over the room, the heaps of clothing on the floor, the open closet door and the two gaping traveling bags. He said again, looking at Drake: "Sit down." When Drake didn't move, Mayo's narrow body seemed to contract, to tense and draw in without motion. It became hard, compact, purposeful, and when he spoke his flat voice was toneless. He said: "I don't tell you again."

Drake suddenly saw madness in the small exquisite features; in their white glistening sheen something flamed paler and more merciless than fire. He realized in the instant that he moved to obey that Pete Mayo would shoot — that Pete Mayo wanted to shoot.

He was cold, not afraid, wary. He sat down. Crossing to him, behind him, Pete Mayo's steps were soundless, light, as if there were no weight in his body. He said: "Put your hands behind you." Drake obeyed, felt a thin loop fasten about his wrists, grow tighter until the edge of it sliced into his flesh.

He moved suddenly, knocking his chair back, jerking his body to one side as he fell. Metal flashed in the light above him, crushed hard, cold, on to his skull. He felt no pain. Red light streamed like drunken lightning across his eyeballs, burst in a crimson glow that expanded and covered the room.

When he could see again he was on the floor, on his side, his head pushed against the cold metal roller of the bed. His legs were bent up a little, fastened to his arms. Someone seemed to beat with a great muffled hammer at the inside of his skull. It was very painful.

His eyes roamed dully around the room, picked out Pete Mayo's slender form before the dresser. The pale man was silent, attentive to the cord held in his widely separated hands, snapping it once, twice. He turned to Drake.

The perfect oval of Mayo's face was absorbed, very white. His arms, his legs, moved in a delicate precision as he crossed the rug. He knelt before Drake, turning Drake's bound body until it rested on its back.

Drake stared up at the ceiling cluster of bulbs, watched them contract, dim, flow out and expand to an enormous brilliance. The hammer kept thudding inside his skull, and he felt the blows of it all over his body like a heart beating with intolerable force. He could not think clearly; a formless surge of dark gray rolled forward and back in alternate waves inside his skull.

He shook his head, annoyed. He tried to speak to Pete Mayo. He wanted to ask him what the hell was the matter. But something soft and bulky was forced far back in his mouth, parting his jaws, rubbing coarsely against his tongue. The sound Drake made was hoarse, moaning.

Pete Mayo lifted Drake's head, passed something under it, put it back. The something was slender, ridged. Drake rolled his eyes down heavily and saw one of the small white hands on either side of his neck. The hands were bent palm to him, with the fingers clenched down on the thing they held. Pete Mayo crossed wrists, transferred the cord ends from one to the other. He began to breathe very fast.

He drew his arms apart slowly. The cord slid a bit on Drake's throat, then tightened. The monstrous hammer stopped beating inside his head and his body, below the neck, grew intensely hot. Trying to move, to struggle, he discovered in the queer fog of his mind that he could no longer breathe. Above him the milky white balls of Pete Mayo's eyes spread with a steady growth over the paleness of each iris, leaving them blank, horrible.

Fire scorched Drake's throat, biting at the tissue. He twisted his head, threw back his body madly, writhed on the floor. Pete Mayo was laughing; his arms tensed and drew wider; the complete whiteness of his eyes gave to his face the expression of an idiot.

Drake's mind swam down and down, became infinitesimal in the giant's stature of his body that seemed to fill the room, to tower and broaden in the swirling streams of brilliant light that circled him in the empty space of soaring. For a moment the lights cleared, and the pain stopped. He could see. He was quite peaceful, calm. He could see the mad laughter, the madder exultation in the narrow, insane face of Pete Mayo above him. Then the lights came again, and faded slowly, silently, to grayness.

Out of the grayness Nicky whimpered, his face frightened: "Gosh Almighty, boss, I thought the rat put you down. I been workin' on you for ten minutes. You —"

Drake with an immense effort pushed the upper part of his body erect, resting it against the bed. Nicky's voice droned meaninglessly around him. His throat seemed swollen, dry, and packed with harsh

cotton burning slowly. When he tried to speak he made a croaking sound; it sounded so funny to him that he laughed. He laughed, putting his head back against the metal bar.

Nicky said: "Now, boss — now, boss," looking wildly around the room. He got up and ran across the floor that billowed under Drake's eyes in slow steady waves. Drake wondered, interestedly, how he did it. Pete Mayo was lying before him, on his face. He was curious, too, about that.

Nicky came back, his eyes distracted, and slopped water from a glass down on him. Drake reached greedily for the tumbler, got it, and sloshed the liquid down the fiery tube of his throat. It hurt going down, but when he had swallowed it he felt better, more normal. He managed to get to his feet.

"——!" sighed Nicky, over a long breath. "Boss, I'll tell you —"

Drake croaked again, pointed his finger at Pete Mayo and raised inquiring brows.

Nicky scowled, spoke slowly, with hatred. "The lousy little rat. I saw him come in, but a dizzy operator gave me the wrong number. When I got 906 I recognized his voice say hello. I made out I had the wrong place, asked for Joe. Then I came up here to wait in the hall. I didn't know what to do. But after a while I got nervous — the door wasn't locked but I couldn't hear anything — so I come in. Mayo didn't hear me; he had the rope around your neck and I saw his hands pullin' it." Nicky reached out with his foot and pushed it into Pete Mayo's side. "So there was a chair here and I smacked him with it. Which is all, boss."

Drake looked and saw a chair splintered by the body. He rasped: "Dead?"

Nicky said: "No," regretfully. "But he won't feel like doin' much for the rest of the night."

Drake nodded, steadying himself with one hand on the footrail of the bed. His mind felt light and uncontrolled; he had a constant desire to burst out laughing. There seemed to be something inexpressibly funny in the back of his head but he could not think what it was.

Nicky's arm helped him to the door and out into the hall. The dimmer light there was grateful to his pain streaked eyes, though the corridor itself seemed narrow and infinitely long. He staggered a little, pushed away Nicky's arm, but managed to reach Miss Carrigan's desk steadily enough.

Her face gaped in surprise when she saw him. "Why, Mr. Drake," she said. Her bright little nose sniffed suspiciously, seemed to wiggle; she shook her head sternly, in disapproval.

Drake couldn't help laughing at her face, her expression. The sounds bubbled from him and exploded against the walls in a rush he couldn't stop. Miss Carrigan looked outraged, old maidish, quite forty. The illogical thought came to him that she must be thinking of the duplicity of man.

He laughed, roared. The spasm drained him of breath and he leaned over gasping. Before him the metal doors of the elevator shaft drew noiselessly apart, and Neil Grant and the girl got off. Drake began, after an instant, to roar again with laughter. Neil Grant smiled, not understanding, but brightly.

"What ho!" he said. "A large evening for the boys."

Drake boomed: "I'm drunk. I'm drunk as hell! I want to blow things up, Grant. High's sky, higher!" He threw one hand clumsily to the ceiling, let it plop down on the blond man's shoulder. He shook him playfully, his eyes cunning, his mouth pleading. "And I want one more drink before I blow. One more. How about it, friend?"

Nicky looked angry. "Come on," he growled. "What the hell's the matter with you?" He shook his head disgustedly.

Drake leered: "He thinks I'm drunk. Me!" The great laughter roared forth, reverberated. "Me, Grant!" He spoke quietly, confidentially in the hoarse whisper of an intoxicated man. "I've got a tip — a good tip. On the Derby, Grant. For you. You're my friend." He half closed one eye, put his head to the side, moved a finger before his face. "But you've got to give me a drink, friend, to get it. Just one. I'm dying for it."

Neil Grant took his arm. The brown eyes were bright, gay. His glance shot to the girl warningly as she said: "For crying out loud —" and stopped when she caught his look.

They left Miss Carrigan's outraged presence, with the girl annoyed, Nicky sour looking and uncertain.

The blond man's room was nine eleven, two doors down across the corridor from Pete Mayo's. Inside, Drake sprawled in a chair, breathing heavily, as if asleep. He didn't move until Neil Grant brought him a glass of Scotch.

Then he got up, lunging to one side, staggered to the bathroom door behind the bed. He muttered, heavy eyed: "All right, friend. You'll excuse — the lady —" He hiccoughed, bowed to the girl, wavered with drunken dignity past her. He lurched inside, hiccoughed again, closed the door.

There he crossed steadily enough to the basin. In the mirror his face stared back at him, darkly congested, the eyes bleary. He grinned without mirth. Not hard to convince anybody he was blotto, looking that way. There was a livid mark apparent on his neck when he bent forward, and he pulled the linen collar of his shirt higher to conceal it.

From his inside pocket he took a pen and a small leather notebook. On one of the unlined pages in back he wrote rapidly: "Go downstairs, phone Detective Proctor at Police Headquarters. Get him over as soon as you can and wait for him. Then bring him right up. Don't mind anything I say before Grant."

He put back the pen, folded the pa-

per in a small ball and concealed it in his palm, then ran the water thirty seconds before going out. In the bedroom he saw the girl had gone, and noticed from the tail of his eye Nicky looking sourly at him from the bed.

Neil Grant was handsome, gracious. "About that tip?" he smiled.

"Oh, no," Drake said, cunningly. "Not that way, friend. Firsht — the drink." He picked up the glass of Scotch, drained it, continued: "A cigarette — must have smoke." He lurched over to Nicky's scowl, said: "Whass matter, kid? No fun? Come on, get hot." Nicky gave him a pack of cigarettes and he took one out, lit it. Under the cardboard box, as he returned it, he slid the piece of paper, pressing it into Nicky's palm.

Neil Grant said, his words eager, fast: "But the tip, Drake? You're not going to forget that?"

"Thirty to one," Drake said. "That's what she'll pay. Got that? Now —" he turned to Nicky. "You get Brannigan, bring him up here, right away." He roared suddenly: "Damn you, get going."

Nicky looked sullen, puzzled. He held the pack of cigarettes in his hand, hesitated a moment, then at Drake's clumsy pass went across to the door and out. Drake dropped on the bed, turned over, began to snore.

Ten minutes later Nicky and Proctor came in. Drake lifted himself dully, rubbed his eyes, boomed out: "Brannigan, pal! I'm ringing a friend in, got it? All my friends in. Good thing — can't miss."

Proctor said: "Ya-yuh," cheerfully, looking at Neil Grant.

The blond man appeared uncertain. He said:

"But you haven't told me the horse's name."

Drake said: "All right. Brannigan's my commissioner — places money. Spreads it around — Chicago, St. Looey, New York. Wires it like that, just before race time. Then it's put down. Then no chance to beat down odds, unnerstand? Still high, thirty to one. But the money mustn't be bet at track. That knocks down odds, beats hell out of 'em. Unnerstand?" He made a sweeping motion with his hand. "Okey, friend. You give Brannigan five thousand dollars, now. Got it?"

"Five thousand dollars!" Neil Grant pressed his lips far out, then drew them together into his cheeks in a grimace that resembled a smile. "I don't know that I —"

Drake roared with sudden violence: "Then to hell with you! I don't have to beg the tip. Do I have to beg it? Do I, Brannigan? No piker money goes down with Chicago Drake." He got off the bed, said again, bitterly: "To hell with you!" and lurched for the door. "Let's go down for a drink, Brannigan."

Neil Grant's voice and smile were conciliatory. "Don't be like that, Drake. I'll get it. A minute —"

He went over to the closet, entered it, was concealed by its door for thirty seconds. When he came out there was a large manila envelope in his hand,

bulged out thickly in the center. Without speaking he placed a sheaf of bills on the table, looked up sidewise at Drake, the brown glitter in his eyes amused and tolerant.

Drake was boisterous and his voice was loud. "Tip on Gallant, boy. You got it now. Five grand there, Brannigan?"

Proctor took up the bills, flipped each one straight in the center like a bank teller, and counted them out upon the table. There were three five-hundred-dollar-bills, the rest hundreds, older, more used, than the others.

Proctor reached three thousand, four. They all watched him. He droned: "Forty-five hundred —"

Drake said: "Wait a minute." His face hardened, became clear, and he lost his drooling smile. He reached over and picked up the hundred dollar bill Proctor had just put down; he brought it close to his eyes, nodded, looked up at Neil Grant. He said: "You killed Joe Madigan."

The blond man kept smiling; his eyes kept bright. He said softly: "You're not drunk, Drake. You tried to trick me."

"I'm not drunk," Drake said. He held the bill taut between fingers, read off the serial number. "06091113. That was Madigan's getaway money — his lucky bill. Ended in thirteen; Joe was superstitious about it. He'd had the bill for years, and everyone that knew him knew that. This afternoon in the train you saw him take it out of his vest pocket and kiss it and put it back. He said something — I forget. But when you went back to kill him you didn't forget to take it, after you'd taken the bag. Pretty cheap, Grant. So cheap it's going to hang you."

Neil Grant said, shaping his mouth: "No." He leaned forward, soft voiced, smiling, triumph relaxing his mouth, making merry glitters of light in his brown eyes. "No, Drake. Shall I tell you why?" He chuckled, looking around at each of them in turn. "Because it isn't Joe's getaway money. The killer might have known that, too — known the thirteen Joe was superstitious about. But they'll find Joe's bill in his vest pocket when they search his suit. That's the one thing you didn't know, Drake."

Drake said slowly: "I didn't know, Grant. Only one man did know. The man that murdered Madigan."

Neil Grant looked thoughtful, not concerned, nodded after a moment. "Yes," he said. "You'll call as witnesses Brannigan, your tout? Nicky, your friend? Yourself?" He laughed aloud. "We know it, Drake. We three. Unfortunately there isn't a judge, a jury, to hear. So —"

Proctor lost his cheerfulness; his voice grew surly, his face hard. "Uh-huh," he said. "You got me wrong, mister. My name's Proctor; I'm a detective on the city homicide squad."

He lunged for Grant, staggered back with blood flowing from his nose at the snapping of the blond man's arm, swift and keen like a rapier.

Nicky staggered, went down under a kick; only Drake, his lean body shooting from the chair, barred the corridor door.

But Neil Grant didn't move for that; he raced back, his handsome face sullen, hard, with dark horror coating the eyes. Proctor's body contorted by the table and drew up, and shots — one, two — crashed over one another in the narrow walls of the room.

Neil Grant made the bathroom door — staggering, he made it, and clicked it behind him. Proctor, squinting, brushing the red stream away from his nose, went over to it. He said to Drake: "A way out from here?"

Drake shook his head, coming across, and together with the short man threw his body against the door. There was a sound from inside. The scraping whine of a raised window.

Proctor grunted breathless: "Fire-escape?"

"No," Drake said. "But I think he knows that."

Proctor looked at him, pulled down his mouth corners, said: "I should worry." He placed his revolver close to the door, fired twice, again, then pushed out the lock and went in.

The room was empty. Thin curtains fluttered lightly in the night breeze from the open window. When Drake crossed to it and looked out he saw, far below, long lines of small things like ants scurrying along the light-splotched stone canyon. There was a knot of them below him, and the long lines converged on this. But there was an open space in the center, with something spread out, and this the ants did not touch.

In the elevator Nicky said: "How did you figure him in, boss? After Mayo tried to croak you —"

Drake's tired face moved irritably. "My throat hurts like hell," he said. He put up fingers and rubbed it tenderly. "They got a name for men like Pete Mayo, but I don't know what it is. The act of death means something to him that life itself doesn't. He loves death too much to be quick about it. He wouldn't have shot Madigan on the train — too abrupt for his fancy, too dangerous. He's a professional. He saw right off what I was trying to pin on him, and, catching me where it was all on his side, he would have killed me. If he wasn't a little insane he would have shot me at once.

"I wasn't sure it was Grant; but when I figured it wasn't Mayo, the odds were it was Grant and I was certain it couldn't have been Jimmy Harris. So I took the chance. Miss Carrigan thought I was drunk; when Grant got off the elevator I knew he thought the same. I played it up."

Sirens screamed as they crossed the lobby; a heavy car slid past the front windows and braked, whining, to a stop. Two men came out of it with a stretcher.

*Fulton Oursler (alias Anthony Abbot), creator of Thatcher Colt, detective, and Rupert Hughes, creator of Dirk Memling, criminal, combine their rich talents on the strange story of Henry Dawkins, the member of a murder jury who went to extraordinary lengths to live dangerously . . .*

# THE THRILL IS GONE

*by FULTON OURSLER and RUPERT HUGHES*

THE NEWS in yesterday's papers was not the beginning of a new life for Henry Dawkins, as many of his friends supposed, but the logical next step in a strange and long-concealed pattern that stretched from his cradle to the courtroom.

The hidden passion of Henry's heart was a desire for excitement, a dream of adventure and danger. He was a small, freckled man with volcanic blue eyes and he worked in a piano factory in one of the distant and almost uninhabited reaches of the Bronx. He lived not far from the plant in the third floor front of a rooming house. In his room was a grand piano and a shelf filled with secondhand detective and Western novels. Henry could not play the piano and had bought his instrument merely to make the proper impression on his employer. Neither was he a detective or a cowboy, but he lived in a storybook world, always hoping that some day something would happen to him. And one day something did.

There came in Henry's mail a summons for jury duty. As he was not acquainted with the defendant, had never been arrested, and had no prejudices against capital punishment, he was acceptable to both sides, and so became a member of the jury.

The prisoner was Wilma Bowers, a widow, and the charge was that she had willfully, and knowingly, and with malice aforethought, dropped into her husband's beer enough cyanide of potassium to kill a horse. Mrs. Bowers admitted having bought the poison but only at her husband's command. She admitted also that she had induced him to take out a life insurance policy for ten thousand dollars, but she felt this was no more than proper wifely prudence. Finally she asserted that her husband had suffered from chronic headaches and dosed his own beer with poison because he was tired of pain. In fact, he wrote a suicide note and left it on the table in the hall. Unfortunately, in the distraction of her grief, Wilma could not remember where she had mislaid this vital document.

"A likely story!" flared the district attorney, rolling his eyes at the jury. But Dawkins was not listening to the

*From Colliers, copyright, 1942, by Fulton Oursler and Rupert Hughes*

district attorney. He could concentrate only on the lovely prisoner. Henry thought that Wilma was a fascinating, glamorous creature. The modest dressing of her dark hair, the hope and fear in her large eyes, the curvacious figure, made the blood incandescent in his veins. In fact, he barely heard the impassioned arguments of prosecutor and counsel for defense.

The first vote in the jury room was eleven to one for a verdict of guilty. The one acquittal ballot was Henry's. When he realized that all the other jurors were ready to send the beautiful prisoner to the electric chair he was stunned. Then he sprang into action. Never a garrulous man, he suddenly found himself gifted with a superb eloquence. He argued and debated, pleaded and denounced, while hours rolled on. Just before dinner, a second vote was taken and the count stood seven to five — for acquittal. By midnight, the last stand-out for electrocution, a Mrs. Harrington, changed her vote. The jury reported a unanimous vote of not guilty.

Naturally the defense attorney learned of the magnificent behavior of Henry Dawkins. The result was an invitation to luncheon, from which counsel then excused himself. Wilma Bowers and Henry were alone at last.

Eventually Henry said, "You are the most wonderful woman in the world. I wish I could be with you forever."

"This is sudden," admitted Wilma, "but I like it. I accept."

One week later they were married. Then began for Henry Dawkins a period of ecstatic and thrill-filled days and nights. Wilma, the widow, was a tender and affectionate teacher of her bachelor pupil. But the familiar joys of wedlock were of wholly secondary importance to Henry Dawkins. He accepted them only as a pleasant by-product of a larger bliss. His was a secret and solitary happiness, the thrill of living close to danger.

Not for one moment had Henry ever felt himself deceived about Wilma. He devoutly believed the whole story as told to the jury by the district attorney. Now he felt certain that the time would soon come when she would do to him what she did to her first husband. At last he was living a real adventure! Thus he was not surprised when Wilma suggested that he take out life insurance; he signed the application with glee. Until the policy was issued he felt uncomfortably and disappointingly secure.

But once the policy, naming Wilma as sole beneficiary, without possibility of change, was delivered to him, life really became exciting. If Wilma baked an apple pie, Henry tasted it with eyes to one side, tongue poised, for the distant tang of an alien taste. He went curiously to sleep wondering if he would ever wake up.

Then came a winter's night, with the wind crying like a bad child. The lamps were low in the Dawkins' living room, and Henry was in his easy chair reading a detective novel. Through the door came Wilma, smiling; in one

hand she carried an empty glass and in the other an uncapped bottle. Henry's heart vaulted and fell. He remembered; his predecessor had passed out after a draught of beer.

"My dear," he grinned, "that looks like brown October ale. You remember — the song in Robin Hood?"

"Robin Hood?" repeated Wilma, aghast. "Did you say Robin Hood?"

"Yes," said Henry. "Anything wrong about it?"

Wilma's hand, pouring the beer, began to tremble. "Robin Hood," she repeated. "I remember now."

She rushed across the room toward the bookcase, and her hands raced from title to title. She gave a little triumphant squeal and pulled out a book, shook it, and a piece of white paper fluttered to the floor. With a cry from the heart she seized it and held it triumphantly before Henry's bug-eyed stare. There it was, and no mistake. Her first husband's note, proclaiming his intention to commit suicide.

Wilma was not a murderess. She was vindicated. . . .

The squib in yesterday's paper told how Henry Dawkins of the Bronx went to Reno and got his divorce.

## NEXT MONTH . .

*ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE* will contain:

THE CLUE OF THE RED WIG by *John Dickson Carr*
THE BODY IN GRANT'S TOMB by *Cornell Woolrich*
A BOTTLE OF PERRIER by *Edith Wharton*
THE FRANTICK REBEL by *Lillian de la Torre*
THE DAUPHIN'S DOLL by *Ellery Queen*
CHEATING THE GALLOWS by *Israel Zangwill*

and other distinguished stories, both new and old, including a surprise "discovery."

# *CHALLENGE TO THE READER*

*In 1895 M. P. Shiel, that comparatively unsung genius of the weird and the fantastic, had his first book published. The three short stories in* PRINCE ZALESKI *were a frank throwback to Poe's Dupin trilogy which had first appeared in book form exactly half a century before. Like Poe, however, Shiel wearied of his eccentric sleuth and abandoned him — for precisely another half-century.*

*And therein lies our tale . . .*

*It is not commonly known that in 1945 Mr. Shiel revived the character of Prince Zaleski — he wrote a fourth Zaleski short story especially for EQMM, but strangely enough we were not even aware of the epic event until it was too late. The details were sent to us by John Gawsworth, a personal friend and at times a collaborator of Mr. Shiel's. As Gawsworth expressed it, the return of Prince Zaleski nearly cost Mr. Shiel his life. The fourth, and last, Zaleski story was written in October 1945, when the author was past eighty. As soon as the manuscript was finished, Mr. Shiel walked to Horsham to mail it to EQMM's First Annual Short Story Contest. The effort was too much for the grand old man: he fainted and was taken to a hospital. When he recovered Mr. Shiel was uncertain whether or not he had actually posted the manuscript. In any event, the story never reached EQMM, and no trace of the original was ever found. Mr. Shiel died on February 17, 1947 and the mystery of the missing manuscript will probably remain a mystery forever. But think: if an accident of fate had not intervened, we should have gained possession of the only Prince Zaleski manuscript extant!*

*While we cannot bring you a new Prince Zaleski story — and now that Mr. Shiel is dead all hope for the resurrection of Prince Zaleski is gone — we can bring you a Shiel story which, according to the author himself, has never been published in the United States. It is a story, moreover, that was written by Mr. Shiel in collaboration with his good friend John Gawsworth. It is a story, too, that reveals Mr. Shiel's genius for the weird and the fantastic, and yet within the framework, within the technical boundaries, of the modern detective story.*

*So, dear reader, hone thy logic — one of the great Old Masters is throwing down the gauntlet. Whet thy wits, dear reader — one of the Old Foxes is laying down the clues. And just before the end, when Mr. Shiel says (through his character, Uncle Quintus) that he has "provided you with sufficient clues to solve the problem," we shall have a few more words to say — by way of warning!*

# A CASE FOR DEDUCTION

*by M. P. SHIEL and JOHN GAWSWORTH*

"Since you pride yourself on solving mysteries," said my Uncle Quintus, puffing from a petty pipette the smoke of some preparation of *cannabis* which had followed him from the East, "I will give you some facts in the case of a young artist friend of mine, Aubrey Smith; enough, I should think, for you to elucidate and explain his troubles to me, without my telling you the successful conclusions arrived at by the detective in charge. That would interest you?"

"Indeed, yes," I replied, and settled down into my fireside armchair to listen attentively and to make notes.

"Well," pursued my Uncle Quintus, "that night when he was to rescue two lives from — death, maybe, Aubrey Smith, as was his way on Wednesdays, spent the evening with his sweetheart, Hylda, at Rose Villa, her home in Clapham. But from the moment when she opened the door to Aubrey that evening, Hylda had a feeling that this Wednesday was in some way special and different from the rest.

" 'Quite a beauty,' she said of the bouquet which Aubrey handed her, but with a touch of reproach she said it, since Aubrey could ill afford such displays. Every Wednesday, it was true, he brought a bouquet, but this was a mass that must have cost ten shillings.

"She wondered why, and he knew that she wondered, there was such a sympathy between their natures, yet he offered no explanation; and she wondered why he was in black, with a black tie. . . .

"Captain Hood himself — Hylda's father — noticed it, as they sat to dinner, and made the remark, 'Why, Aubrey, you look as if you were in mourning tonight.'

" 'But you know, sir,' said Aubrey, 'that I am the last of the crew — I haven't a relative now to mourn for.'

"But he said it with shy eyelids, and Hylda, to whose ken his soul was an open book, understood that this evening Aubrey, for some reason, was concealing something or other from her.

"That startled her heart! There was the big bouquet, the black garb. . . . What, then, was in the wind? Her eyes, when he was looking at his plate, kept silently inquiring it of his face.

"Once when Captain Hood had limped his lamed leg to his ingle-nook to muse there over his cheroot as usual, Aubrey looked as if disposed to tell something; Hylda by this time

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had withdrawn her pampered Lupot fiddle from its silk covering, and had it at her chin, Aubrey was accompanying her on the piano, and all down Rosehill Road faces were looking out from the rows of oriels, as was usual on Wednesday evenings, to hear the music — for Hylda, the hope of the Royal College, could make her fiddle discourse strange sorrows. She and Aubrey had done the *Sonata in F*, and were about to give a *Lied*, when, in the interval, their hands met as they turned the leaves of the second book, their hands and their eyes, and Hylda smiled, and he smiled; and he began then to say, 'Hylda, perhaps I had better tell you ——' when Captain Hood from his nook called out, 'Aubrey, let me hear that last melody of the *Wallenstein* that I like'; and Aubrey called back: 'Quite so, sir,' and started to render it.

"After which for hours they wearied out the ear with sweetness, and through it all Hylda waited to hear, but Aubrey said nothing.

" 'Dear heart,' she whispered to him at the door near eleven when he was going, gazing up a moment on his breast into those girl-beguiling eyes of Aubrey, 'God keep you.'

"He stooped to kiss her — a steepish stoop, he was so high up compared with her — saying, 'We'll meet for luncheon tomorrow at the Circus,' and he went, she gazing after him, he in the falling snow waving his hat back at her — the most picturesque old hat on this planet, in such an egregious tone of green, turned down over the nose, with *Art Student* and *Latin Quarter* written all over it — and he was gone from her.

"He took train at Clapham Junction for Victoria, and from Victoria was off afoot (to save 'bus fare!) to his little flatlet in Maida Vale.

"It was during this tramp that he rescued the two lives.

"In an alley behind the Edgware Road it was. At that very spot, earlier in the night, a hungry man, who had desired to go to prison, had broken a street lamp; and just there, as Aubrey passed, stood a cab and a barrow, blocking the way; at the same moment a motor-car came round a corner, and, its driver not apparently sighting the barrow under the cab's shadow, dashed on. Out of Aubrey's mouth a shout of warning broke; in the rashness of the moment he even ran out from the pavement, so that, although the driver at once had his brakes on, Aubrey was knocked staggering, as the car bumped softly upon the barrow.

"In a moment there stood with him an old man and a young lady from the car, the old man saying: 'My dear sir! are you hurt?'

" 'Not a bit!' Aubrey cried.

" 'Papa, this is you in the rôle of chauffeur,' the young lady remarked — in a queer species of whisper, husky, rapid, which, however (though the noise of the engine, running free, was in the ear), Aubrey could still hear.

" 'Now, Laura!' — the old man

turned upon her to insist that he was an accomplished chauffeur, then requested that Aubrey must go home with him for a glass of whisky, rather confirming Aubrey's surmise that he was talking to an Irishman.

" 'But, sir, really ——' he began to say.

" 'Yes, come,' Laura said to him in that same whispered way, and he gathered that her voice, owing to some affection of the vocal chords, was gone.

" 'Yes, come.' There she stood, almost as tall as her tall father, draped in a pony-skin coat, its opening framing her face. 'Yes, come.' And now he went.

" 'An adventure!' he said, as the three passed into a house in Brook Street: 'on my birthday, too' — this fact not having been mentioned to his sweetheart, Hylda Hood; and although he and Hylda had been engaged since they were thirteen, Hylda still remained ignorant what day his birthday was.

" 'Your birthday?' from the old man, whose name had now turned out to be Sir Phipps O'Dowdy O'Donague: 'now, that's singular. I'll give you some whisky for it — come on!'

"Aubrey was brought into an apartment with silken walls and two brawling fires; and here, pointing to a picture, he said at once, 'Why, I saw that in last year's Academy.'

" '*Ego pinxi*,' Laura said with a curtsey.

" 'Awfully well done,' he breathed under it.

" 'Praise from Raphael.' She curtseyed again.

" 'Who told you that I am an artist?' he asked.

" 'I may be dumb,' she said, 'but I'm not blind.'

" '*You* dumb?' he cried: 'not quite, I think!'

"Her tongue flew as she sat stooped forward before him, her chin on her fists, flew in that breathy throat-whisper that went on as busily as a threshing-machine, or paddle-boxes threshing the sea; and he, listening with one ear to her and with the other to her father — for they fought against each other, speaking together in a race — thought that he had never lighted upon a pair of such live and brilliant beings. Father and daughter tossed rains of repartee at each other, jeered at each other, despaired of each other, yet were evidently chums. Neither could sit still six minutes. Sir Phipps jumped up to show the latest novel by Bourget, Laura jumped up, humming, to dash her hand over the piano keys, to show a Welsh crowth, or a miniature of Coquelin. Before twenty minutes Aubrey was at home with them; and once — the whisky had then come, and Laura had run out for a moment — Sir Phipps furtively took from out of his breast pocket a photograph, and furtively gave Aubrey a glimpse of it — the photograph of a lady.

" 'Well, the old sinner!' was Aubrey's first thought; his second was: 'How perfect a beauty!'

" 'La Rosa,' whispered the old man,

thinking apparently that Aubrey would know the name; but Aubrey had no notion who La Rosa was.

"He wanted to take the photograph to feast his eyes on it; but now they could hear Laura's steps, and Sir Phipps hurriedly hid it.

"After this for hours Aubrey could hardly find a chance to say 'Now I must go': if he did, it was at once drowned in talk, and he passed a merry night, which was only marred by one awkward moment, when, during another absence of Laura, Sir Phipps hurriedly drew a check, and held it out to Aubrey.

" 'My good sir!' Aubrey breathed with shy eyelids.

" 'Tush!' Sir Phipps said, 'you are only a boy, and I an old fellow whose life you have saved — your birthday, too.'

" 'Yes, sir,' — from Aubrey, with a breath of laughter, 'but really — I am only sorry that these things can't be done.'

" 'Oh, well, we won't quarrel over it' — Sir Phipps tore the check in shreds.

"Aubrey could hear Big Ben striking three, as he stepped out into streets now powdery with snow, over which a late and waning moon had moved up, revealing him to Laura, who at a window peered after him till he disappeared. Laura at that window then clasped her hands behind her neck, and stretched, and then, alone in the room, lay sideways on a sofa, and mused. What a tall, rough-clad fellow! she thought; his dash of dark mustache did not cover his rich lips; he had a modest way of lowering his eyelids, which was both shy and disdainful; he threw out odd breaths of laughter: and under the eyelids, eyes all beauty, like the Moonlight Sonata, drowsy, brown, brown. She turned, and stretched, murmuring, 'Yes, charming,' with half a yawn, and half a laugh, and said 'Ah!'

"Aubrey, for his part, on getting home, sat up yet an hour smoking cigarettes, thinking it out, and soon came to the conclusion that he would go no more to the O'Donagues. Laura was a remarkable creature, he thought! So lively, vital — and pretty; even the loss of her voice somehow added to her: just as she was, she was — she, was 'just *so*.' His brain kept comparing Laura with Hylda: Hylda was little, Laura big; Hylda was fair, with a broad face, dimples in her smile, bright eyes that laughed; Laura was dark, and had gaudy eyes. Which was the prettier — Laura or Hylda? Certainly, Laura was as far prettier than Hylda as La Rosa was more lovely than Laura. But Hylda was good, born good to the heart — was Laura good? Laura was glitter, Hylda was gold; if Laura was a genius, Hylda was an angel. 'Well, the birthday has come, and the birthday has gone,' he murmured at last; and tossing off the mourning clothes, he turned in to bed.

"The next day at luncheon in their usual Piccadilly tea shop, on his relating the adventure to Hylda, she overwhelmed him with questions as to

Laura — Laura's looks, Laura's throat-whisper, Laura's touch, and was she really so very clever? 'And are you expected to go back?' — her eyes fastened on his face, for wherever she was with him, she could not help it, she could see nothing but him alone; she hung only upon him, her soul dancing in her gladdened glances: 'did they seem really to want you again?'

" 'I think so,' Aubrey answered; 'but I'm not going, all the same.'

" 'Why not?'

" 'Hard to say quite why.' His eyes dropped from her face.

"But Aubrey was not to escape the baronet so easily, for only a week later that Rolls car which he had saved from a shock drew up before his block of flats, the O'Donague mounted many stairs to him, and, glancing round Aubrey's cheap but chaste interior, remarked: 'Now, this *is* a charming den I find you in!' while Aubrey stood all shy eyes at the honor, and brought forth liqueurs. The fact was, that the old baronet had an absolute need of someone new to whom to give peeps of Salvadora Rosa's photograph and make a confidant of, and his fancy had fixed upon Aubrey: so that within a month or two now, Aubrey, without having ever set eyes on her, knew La Rosa by rote. She turned out to be a lady with something of a European fame, Spanish by birth, divorced wife of a Polish Count; and what mainly made her notorious, apart from some duels and suicides which had been due to her, was the fact that she had a little daughter whom her ex-husband had for years been seeking to sneak from her: for this child, on attaining her eighteenth year, would be as rich as Crœsus: so Salvadora Rosa, who seemed to have a keen sense of the good of money, stuck to the child, though its father was its lawful guardian. At that moment, Sir Phipps told Aubrey, though scores of secret emissaries in several countries were intriguing to get at the child, probably no soul but Salvadora Rosa and her own agents had any notion where the child was.

" 'Must be a clever sort of lady,' Aubrey remarked.

" 'Clever as ten monkeys!' Sir Phipps cried out.

" 'Rich?'

" 'She is like a bank or the Severn — sometimes full, sometimes empty,' Sir Phipps O'Dowdy O'Donague answered: 'it comes and it goes, like a maid's flushes and the monthly moon. At present, it strikes me, she is rather hard up — *embarrasée*, her little tongue calls it, with a roll on the *r*.'

" 'Take care she doesn't get what she wants from *you*, sir.'

" 'My dear fellow, you are talking of a lady.'

" 'I beg pardon,' Aubrey said.

"But he seemed destined to have to hear of La Rosa: although he did not go to Brook Street (save once to a crush-reception, when he got only glimpses of Miss O'Donague) Brook Street came to him. One day, looking out of the window, down there in the

street he saw a gig roll slowly past, the reins in a lady's hand, and the lady was Laura O'Donague. He watched with interest to see if she glanced up at his windows, but she did not. However, one day some three months later he opened his door to a rap, and there, to his amazement, was the busy breath of Laura, whispering: 'I have to talk to you about Papa. It is serious.'

"It was all about La Rosa and her Papa that she had come!

" 'You have a lot of influence over Papa, let me tell you,' she said, seated within the nook made by the half-round seat that surrounded Aubrey's fireplace: 'he never so took to anyone as to you; and you have to speak to him.'

"Aubrey began to say: 'I'm rather afraid ——'

"But she said: 'No, really, you don't know how serious it is: he is getting more and more entangled with this lady, and three days ago, just after getting home from her place, had a most strange illness. . . .'

" 'Oh, I say, Miss O'Donague!'

" 'You have no idea of this woman,' Laura said — 'she sticks at nothing. I have never seen her, but one night last week, at the Mansion House, Detective-Sergeant Barker — ever heard of Barker? — impressed upon me that she's most dangerous, said that the woman's hungers are like a tiger's, and it is only because she is so much deeper than the European police that she can continue her career.'

"Aubrey, with puckered brows, sat at a loss what to say, but in the end promised to use his 'influence with poor Papa,' and after an hour's windstorm of whispering, Miss O'Donague at last accused herself of being unconventional in coming alone, and left him.

"Two months later, in July, he spent a weekend with the O'Donagues at Clanning, their seat in Gloucestershire, and then, as they went to Italy, saw them no more for some months.

"It was autumn when the O'Donagues returned to England, passed a fortnight in Gloucestershire, and then were in London once more, La Rosa having also been abroad at the same time; and shortly after she was back, they were back.

"Aubrey was at work one afternoon in November on a *Kermesse*, when the O'Donague anew came breezily in.

" 'I am now straight from Regent's Park [*Regent's Park* meant Salvadora Rosa]; got back from Italy three weeks ago, then went down to Clanning — beastly unpleasant thing happened down there — give me a glass of liqueur: I don't feel well today, boy.'

" 'What unpleasant thing, sir?' — Aubrey presented liqueur.

" 'Not seen it in the papers? Little girl of seven lost from the village — vanished — I knew her quite well; little thing named Ada Price — black-haired — Welsh — nice little thing — child of one of my underkeepers — the whole countryside searched, everybody very excited, and the burden

of it all on me — Oh, I say, I feel bad, Aubrey.'

"Even as he sipped the liqueur Sir Phipps became pale, and presently Aubrey had to accompany him below to his car, the baronet was so tottery. However, Sir Phipps did not look mortally ill, and it was profoundly shocking when at nine o'clock that night Aubrey got a telegram: 'Papa died in the car on the way home from you. I wish to see you. Laura O'Donague.'

"So he was gone, the gay, the bountiful old fellow, with his gray imperial and regal brow. Aubrey's heart smote him at the thought of the daughter who, he knew well, would be very deeply bereaved, and he hurried to her in Brook Street.

"He found her in the baronet's bedroom, however, quite her average self, chatty, agile, showing no sign that anything out of the common had happened. Only once, when she thought that he was not looking, he saw her shake her head at her father's portrait, and smile sorrowfully at it, with the reproach of love. From the chauffeur she already knew all the old man's movements that afternoon: how he had passed from Regent's Park to Aubrey's.

" 'He was hardly ten minutes with me,' Aubrey told her. 'First he spoke of his doings since his arrival from Italy, then of an unpleasant thing happening down at Clanning, and then, saying he felt bad, asked for a liqueur.'

" 'He isn't lying there poisoned, is he?' asked Laura quite calmly over the baronet on his bed.

" 'Oh, I say, don't ——' Aubrey breathed, shrinking.

" 'Aubrey, this world isn't done all in water colors,' she said to him.

"Aubrey's eyes dropped. Laura had called him 'Aubrey'! And even in the presence of that sternness on the bed, some nerve of him that ran down from his crown to his feet thrilled throughout, his brow rushing into brown with a blush.

"That wild word 'poison,' however, was only that one time uttered, since there was nothing to suggest such a thing to any mind, and as Sir Phipps's physician had long been aware that the baronet was suffering from 'tobacco heart,' liable to sudden dilatation, the death certificate and verdict were in accordance.

"All during that funeral week Aubrey was so much with Laura, driving with her, acting the lackey, that actually on three days of it he did not see Hylda at all.

"On returning from the grave-side, 'Now for some Hylda!' he sighed to himself with a certain hunger, like one yearning for fresh air and rest; but the first thing the next morning for him was yet a telegram from Laura in the words:

"More death — I should like to see you.'

"When he went to her it was to learn that an old person, known as Davenport, a butler, for over thirty years in the service of Sir Phipps, had suddenly ceased to live on returning

from the funeral — a new woe which had the effect of throwing Laura O'Donague into an extraordinary passion of anguish. At her father's death her self-control had been so complete as to appear even cold to everyone; but less careful, maybe, in this lesser case, at this second stroke she broke out into torrents of tears, terrible tantrums, hysterias, that astounded her household. Aubrey, however, found her in a condition of mere depression and ill-temper, like a child sullen after punishment. She would hardly speak to him, and when he touched her hand, saying, 'Laura, I am sorry,' she replied: 'Oh, my back is broad. Why did you come?'

"'Did you not send for me? What about this poor Davenport,' said Aubrey: 'at what hour ——?'

" 'Oh, pray don't mention to me the name of Davenport,' said she; 'I am soaked with death.'

"Aubrey wondered why he had been sent for, since she snapped at everything which he could find to say; and before long left her alone to her sorrows.

"It was still too soon for him to go to the tea shop to Hylda, so he went home once more, and it was as he now opened his flat-door that he saw on the floor the note which was to play nine-pins with his whole life.

"It came from some attorneys, and it was a breathless Aubrey Smith whose eyes perused these lines:

> " ' . . . have the pleasure to inform you . . . by the last will of the late Sir Phipps O'Dowdy O'Donague . . . you become the life-legatee of the sum of £175 per annum . . . shall be pleased to see you at your convenience . . . Ife & Siemens. . . .'

"So good, so large, the old man! A good heart that wished one well! Aubrey's eyes sprang water, and then — he ran. Outside, he found walking too slow now, a 'bus too slow, he sprang into a cab — for the tea shop. But he was too soon, Hylda had not come, and now he paced impatiently about, counting the seconds, waiting for the appearance down Piccadilly of a neat figure with a winged toque on her head. Anyhow, all was well now, his way clear. Just that little sum each year, the difference it would make! In three days' time he could be married. . . . For four years now, since she was seventeen, Hylda and he had been ever on the jump of being married, but always the same tiny trouble — no money to buy things with. The old captain on his half-pay had none, Aubrey's masterpieces had had no market. Now it was well.

" 'I haven't really worked, you know, Hylda,' he said to her in the tea shop that day: 'I see it now. I seem to be the laziest beggar going, somehow. But won't I work *now*!'

" 'Dear, you have worked hard,' she answered, 'and this is your well-earned reward.'

" 'But, Hylda, tell me frankly,' Aubrey said, 'is it not a fact that we can be married straight away?'

" 'Dear, there seems to be no reason why not,' Hylda answered; 'you know that I can usually win Papa.'

" 'Then, let's take a half-holiday and go now straight down to Clapham. . . .'

" 'Really so eager for me?' she asked gravely.

" 'Eager is hardly the word: I'm afraid I am a little off my nut.'

" 'All right, let's go, then. . . .'

"It was soon settled: for though Captain Hood, who was of an unmodern school, would not hear of the Registry Office, but must have a church wedding, he agreed that the banns should be given in immediately.

"And now came busy days for Aubrey Smith. His den was too small to take Hylda into, so that had to be changed; and since they were an artist pair, no ordinary purchases would do for the furnishing of that home: stern were Aubrey's exclusions of this and that, delicate his selections, not of the dearest, nor even of the best, but of the best for *his* idea and dream; and all this needed time. At night he would come home worn out, lacked the time to call on the attorneys, as he had been asked to, forgot Laura O'Donague's existence, and of the small sum in his bank spent every penny on the strength of his fresh wealth.

"Once only — one forenoon — he saw Laura for a moment close to Hyde Park Corner, she all mourning black in her car; and she stopped to besiege Aubrey's ear with her busy breath-whispering, asking, 'Have you heard?'

" 'What?' he asked.

" 'About the woman.'

" 'Which woman?'

" 'Why, La Rosa.'

" 'No, not heard.'

" 'Not one penny does she touch! Papa has left her thirty thousand pounds on a life-policy — that's why she poisoned him. . . .'

" 'Oh, Laura, really you are not to say such things even in fun.'

" 'Not one penny does she touch, though! I mean to fight it in every possible way — "undue influence" — When are you coming?'

" 'Soon.'

" 'I don't want you.'

" 'Then I won't come.'

" 'Yes, do. Goodbye ——' She was away.

"It was on that same night, five days before his wedding day, that Aubrey found awaiting him at home yet another letter from the lawyers, this one stating that, as his legacy was, by the terms of the will, to be paid on his birthday, the firm would be glad if he would send them a certificate of birth.

"Having read it, Aubrey sat down, and with his brow on his hand stared there at the floor without a motion for an hour; and though no moan broke from him, his head hung low, like a man who has received a grievous blow, upon whom gloom and ruin have suddenly swooped.

"It would have been far better, he thought, then, if he had never met

that motor-car that night of his birthday, and many times he asked himself with torture why he had ever mentioned to Sir Phipps that that was his birthday: for it was clear that the baronet's idea in thus drawing the will was to remind him through life of the rescue he had effected that night: and Aubrey buried his head, shaking it from side to side, asking himself how he was to tell Hylda that they could not, after all, marry, how he was to make her understand that it was no mere delay that had arisen, but a permanent matter — unless he was to reveal to her now a thing, an old tale of sin and sorrow, a strange and ominous date, which he had so far very artfully contrived to hide from her ken. How tell her this now? How overthrow now all her hopes — for years perhaps? How pay for the ordered articles of furniture that were waiting for payment?

"But on a sudden he started, he was up, with the cry, '*Smith*'!

"There was more than one Aubrey Smith in the world!

"However, he hesitated a little, scratched his forehead, with a puckered nose, asking himself 'Would it be quite pretty?' But the relief, the gaiety, revealed in his grimace, proved that his mind had really decided, whatever scruples might come between; and suddenly he had snatched his hat, and was away with a rush.

"In a cab he drove to a dreary by-street near Russell Square, to a boarding house in it, where in answer to his query if Mr. Aubrey Smith was in, a girl answered him: 'I think he is — right at the top, the door facing the stairs'; and with careful footsteps Aubrey climbed through a darkness that had a fusty odor, high up, till he saw light through a keyhole, tapped at the door, and now a man in a rather ragged dressinggown appeared, peering, demanding, 'Who is it?'

" 'Your namesake, Smith.'

" 'O-ho-o-o!' cried the other Smith. 'My dear fellow, come in' — he bent cordially over Aubrey's hand; however, he suddenly added, 'Wait a moment,' turned back inwards, was heard whispering to someone, and it was two minutes before he returned to let Aubrey in.

"This Aubrey Smith the Second was a man of fifty, handsome, with the rather exaggerated manner which some judges call 'fascinating' (he had been schooled, and had lived, mainly abroad); a military mustache, a ducal carriage; and here was a man of contrasts — cousin of a nobleman, had hobnobbed with princes, living now in a den with holes in the carpet and a broken teapot on the hob. What that head of his did not know of this world was not worth knowing; and who could converse of it more charmingly? Yet there he was, aging and a failure. He had had a career! Had been frozen out of the British-Indian army, had sung in Italian Opera at *La Scala*, had been forbidden evermore to show his nose in Monte Carlo.

" 'My dear fellow!' Smith cried, 'you are the very man, for I have now

a scheme at hand that should bring us in the coolest five thousand each without fail.'

"Aubrey laughed, for many were Smith's schemes, and now he was about to do something astounding in wines, now to sell a mine, to buy a public-house, or build flats: but nothing ever happened: so Aubrey said 'I, too, have a scheme.'

"Instantly Smith was gravity itself; a look of eagerness and business rushed to those old eyes that had seen so much: but at that moment, before Aubrey could say more, a girl of seven, running in from an inner room, was before them.

"At this Smith looked very put out, and was about to bundle her back out of sight, when Aubrey said, 'This your little girl, Smith? I'm sure I didn't know that you had a child.'

" 'A neighbor's child' — from Smith shyly.

" 'Isn't she a little beauty.'

" 'Come, come, young lady, into the next room!' Smith now said in French.

" '*Alors, tu es française, mademoiselle?*' Aubrey asked.

" '*Oui, monsieur,*' the black-haired child replied, with quite a nice bow of the head, and, catching up a doll out of the fender, she ran away back in.

" 'Look here, it's like this, Smith,' Aubrey now said, sitting on a shaky chair before Smith on the bed, 'I have just been left a legacy ——'

" 'O-ho-o-o!' Smith cried with pantomime eyes and a round mouth, 'that's talking! My dear fellow.'

" 'Smith, when is your birthday?' Aubrey asked suddenly.

" 'Birthday? Three days' time — the twenty-fifth ——'

" 'Good!' Aubrey breathed: 'I thought I remembered hearing you say that it is in November. Well, as this legacy of mine — it isn't much, one hundred and seventy-five pounds a year — is to be paid on my birthdays, you have to get your birth certificate, and go and take the money for me, as if you were I.'

" 'But stay — I don't quite see what's what,' Smith said. 'Why am I to assume your personality in this way? Is it because you are urgently hard up, and my birthday comes first?'

" 'No, of course,' Aubrey shyly replied: 'It isn't that: I wish it was merely that; it is something much deeper.'

" 'O-ho-o-o!' Smith cried aloud with a round mouth in his theatrical way: 'ha! ha! *that's* how the land lies — I see!'

" 'So, then, you will, Smith.'

" 'My dear chap, I'm your man.'

" 'Good! And, I say, Smith, I offer you ten per cent. ——'

" 'Not one little sou!' Smith cried; 'it would be odd if I couldn't do you a service of that sort without asking to be tipped. You need merely hand me say thirty shillings now for necessary expenses. . . .'

"So it was settled. Aubrey gave Smith all the facts of the case, also his address, where they were to meet and dine together at seven on the

third night thence, Smith undertaking to bring the hundred and seventy-five pounds with him; and Aubrey went away light of heart.

"But at seven on the third night thence no Smith turned up; and after waiting till eight, till nine, a terrible fright sprang up in Aubrey's heart; and he flew to Bloomsbury to see Smith.

"He was told at Smith's boarding house that Smith had gone away; and no one was aware where Smith had gone to.

"The next morning — the morning before his wedding day — Aubrey gathered from a clerk in the outer office at Ife and Siemens, the attorneys, that Mr. Aubrey Smith had duly presented himself and got the hundred and seventy-five pounds of Sir Phipps O'Dowdy O'Donague's legacy; and feeling too unwell to face Hylda just then, longing only for a hole to hide himself in, Aubrey went home to his new flat.

"It was about two hours afterwards that a curious incident occurred to him there: on the landing outside his flat door was a man crouching with his ear at the keyhole, listening patiently, with a grimace of eagerness on his face, till suddenly he ran soft-footed down the three flights of stairs to the street door, where he whistled, and now another man ran to him from round a corner.

" 'He has the child at this moment in his flat!' the first man, whose name was Barker, whispered to the second.

" 'Sure?' the other asked.

" 'Has *a* child, anyway, if not *the* child, for though I couldn't hear much distinctly, I distinctly heard a child say, *Now that I am seven years of age* ——'

" 'Let's pounce upon him sharp!' Upon which the two men, running up, pressed Aubrey's electric bell.

"Aubrey did not answer it at once, and Barker, his ear at the keyhole, could clearly hear a scurry and whispering within; fully two minutes passed, and then Aubrey appeared.

" 'Your name, I think, is Mr. Aubrey Smith?' Barker asked.

" 'Yes.'

" 'We may mention that we are police officers. Are you living alone in this flat, may I ask?'

" 'Yes.'

" 'You haven't a child of seven now with you, for example?'

" 'No, I'm not married.'

" 'There are more ways of having a child of seven than by being married. We should like to look through the flat.'

" 'My good sir, what is it all *about?* I am engaged . . .'

" 'Listen, sir,' Barker said, 'we have with us no warrant to force a search; but, take my tip, it will be better for you to consent, whether you are innocent or guilty.'

" 'Of what?'

" 'You are believed to have in your custody the child Ada Price, abducted from the village of Clanning, Gloucestershire, on the 3rd instant. You were seen talking to the child on a road ——'

" 'I!' Aubrey cried, with a breath of laughter.

" 'Look here, quick, is it yes or no?'

" 'Well, if you insist, you can search, since that will comfort you,' Aubrey now said; 'but do get it over, officers.'

"The men, now coming in, went first into the newly-furnished drawing-room, and were looking round it when Aubrey did what certainly appeared a suspicious thing — ran down the hall passage, and turned the door key of his new studio. The officers, peeping, of course saw what he did; and when, after looking through the other rooms, they came near to the studio door, Aubrey made a halt.

" 'Not in there,' he whispered to them with shy eyes.

" 'How is that?' Barker wished to know.

" 'Oh, I say, don't raise your voice,' he whispered, blushing; *'there's someone in there.'*

" 'We are well aware of that: let's have a look at her' — now Barker pounded upon the door.

" 'My good sir, will you be so good as to go to the devil,' Aubrey now said in an agonized low tone. 'Come, go out of my flat.'

"The detective scribbled something in his notebook, and without any other word the two turned, went away.

"They did not, however, go far — one of them, at least — for when Aubrey went out afterwards to go down to Hylda's, he saw that he was watched, and understood that he would soon hear from them anew.

"Down there at Clapham the dining-room table was aglitter with wedding gifts, for many were the girl friends of Hylda, many were coming to the wedding, and bright that day were Hylda's eyes to the moment when she opened the door to Aubrey; but instantly now, though he put on his bravest looks, her face clouded.

" 'All not well?' she asked him presently, with a look.

"He could not utterly kill his bride's brightness, and replied: 'Why not?'

"The next morning, his wedding day, he discovered that all his wealth was seventeen-and-sixpence; and having with the sixpence sent a 'good morning' telegram to Hylda, at a loss now how to spend the time till one o'clock, he took his gun and went down to Grange House, a friend's place in Surrey, where there was some shooting, thinking that he would at least shoot his bride's dinner and borrow a five-pound note. He came back rather in a haste, a little late, with a hare and a rabbit, but without the five-pound note, since his friend was away from home, and three at a time he stormed up the flights of stairs to dress: for already it was a quarter to one. On the other hand, the church was hardly three hundred yards away up the street, so that he had no journey to make.

"At three minutes to one Hylda's bridesmaids were there, ready, waiting in the church porch for her; a knot

of people, and a policeman, stood in the street to see; inside, the organist, a personal friend of Hylda's, was amusing his fingers with the tune of *O Perfect Love*; the clergyman stood ready. As the church clock struck one, a carriage bearing the bride, all in heliotrope *voile* with white orchids, bearing also the bride's father, drove round a corner; and one minute afterwards Aubrey, a late and troubled bridegroom, flew down his stairs and out upon the pavement.

"It was just then that at a window above him a girl-child, looking out, cried gleefully aloud in French to some person behind her: 'O, *monsieur!* look! a wedding!' and upon this, the person popped his head out, to look.

Hylda, at the moment, was being handed out of her carriage, but her eyes were on Aubrey coming: and she stood hesitant, one foot on the carriage step, in wonderment at what she saw.

"For, as the child cried 'O, *monsieur*, look!' Hylda saw that Aubrey heard and glanced up, and as the man above popped out his head, she saw that Aubrey saw him, although the man instantly pulled himself back; at which Aubrey seemed to become possessed, for, immediately stopping in his career toward the church, he darted back into the house.

"She was so amazed that there, with her slipper on the carriage step, she remained, staring at the building into which Aubrey had vanished; the eyes of everyone, in fact, had turned from the bride, everyone awaiting in silence what the next instant would bring with it; till in about two minutes, or less, the sound of a gun-shot rang out of the house; from the window at which the child had cried out a cloud of smoke was seen to drift; and now the policeman in the crowd began running. . . .

"He had not, however, run halfway to the house, when out of it darted a dark-haired child, howling, washed in blood, staring, staggering; ten yards from the building she dropped to the ground and lay silent; and as the policeman approached her, out of the door dashed two men, one in a dressing-gown, the other Aubrey, his coat bellying behind him — pelting, both of them, with white, wild faces, the man flying, Aubrey chasing — away from the church; and without delay, leaving the wounded girl on the ground, the policeman, too, blowing his whistle, was pursuing the two, and a fourth man, who had been watching the place on Detective-Sergeant Barker's behalf, joined in.

"The two, however, in their agony of eagerness, easily distanced the two policemen.

At the same moment, Hylda felt her senses almost fail her, and in a sort of vision saw her father prostrate, half on the carriage step, halt on the street, breathing hard in a rather queer way. . . .

"It was nearly two weeks after that distracted wedding day of hers, when, one morning, Hylda Hood presented

herself before Laura in Brook Street.

" 'I do hope I don't come too early ——' Hylda began.

" 'Not even a little. Sit down. I am glad — I am very glad — that you have come. Do you know, I know you quite well — for years, it seems — I could have drawn your face just from Aubrey's chatter of you, and here you are exactly as I conceived you. Only — in black. Why in black?'

"Hylda, looking downwards, after a moment said: 'My father was buried yesterday, Miss O'Donague.'

" 'Oh! poor ——' Laura breathed, shrinking, then in an impulse ran and knelt and kissed Hylda's hands.

" 'He had not been strong for some time,' Hylda remarked, 'and what has happened was all too much for him. I should have come to you before, but have been ill myself; now I feel called upon to make some sort of effort to confront all this mystery, though I'm afraid ——'

" 'Oh, courage, we shall win to the surface yet,' said Laura. '*Seek and you shall find:* I believe in that. I take it that you have not heard from poor Aubrey?'

" 'No,' — low in tone.

" 'Why? Why?' Laura asked of herself, staring.

" 'There can be only two reasons,' Hylda said; 'either he is no longer alive, or he is in some situation in which he finds it impossible to write.'

" 'But what kind of situation can that be? Perhaps he is conscious of having done something wrong, and shrinks from writing ——'

" 'He?' — from Hylda with raised eyebrows; then she smiled, saying, 'Excuse me, I am always assuming that others know him with the same certainty as I do.'

" 'But how can you say *not*, in that undoubting way, Miss Hood? Of the two guns found together in the other man's flat one was Aubrey's, and the gunshots found in the child's throat fit Aubrey's gun, not the other man's; so Detective-Sergeant Barker was telling me ——'

" 'How can he know which of the two is Aubrey's gun?' Hylda asked.

" 'Aubrey's initials are on it!'

" 'Still, Aubrey would hardly have taken up a loaded gun for any reason. . . . It may be that the other man's initials are the same as Aubrey's ——'

" 'It *may* be, of course.'

" 'And as to this other man,' Hylda asked, 'no trace of him yet?'

" 'None!' Laura spun round with a laugh, 'he has disappeared from the face of creation as completely as Aubrey has. It strikes me that the pair of them have been up to something, so both are in hiding.'

" 'Aubrey would not hide, I assure you, Miss O'Donague,' replied Hylda.

"Laura, looking contemplatively at her, remarked: 'Do you know, I think we are going to be friends?'

" 'We won't be foes?' asked Hylda.

" 'Let's hope not. I am a ripping good hater.'

" 'And I am a good lover — if I love. But will you tell me now everything that you know?'

"Laura, now sitting by Hylda's

side, told how 'the other man' who had vanished with Aubrey round that street corner had taken the flat in Aubrey's block of buildings only two days before the wedding day, and had moved into it without waiting to have the flat repapered. He had taken it in the name of 'Hamilton Jones,' but it had been ascertained by the police that this was not really his name. 'Jones' had bought his furniture in Tottenham Court Road only the day before he moved into his new abode, an abode whose hall door happened to face Aubrey's; and whether this 'Jones' had taken that flat knowing that Aubrey was there, or just by chance, or what was the nature of the relation between him and Aubrey, remained all a mystery. As to the wounded child, she was a little maid of seven, of an extraordinary beauty — foreign, it was believed, since dark, and since she wore a diamond medallion of the Madonna about her throat, and as her costume was found to be luxurious in the extreme, it was doubted if she really belonged to this 'Hamilton Jones,' whose furniture was cheap. There was no name on the child's linen, only a bird in blue silk. She was then lying in St. George's Hospital, had not yet spoken, but would recover; and Laura had thrice been to see her.

"To all which Hylda listened with her eyes on the floor, and then a sigh rose from the depths of her; her pretty, broad face looked rather drawn and pale; and Laura, sitting by her, whispered:

" 'Don't be too sad; wait, I'll find him for you; it will be all right'; and she took a hand of Hylda's, saying, 'What lovable hands you have, Miss Hood — Hylda! These warm little mortal hands, imperfect and dear: I am going to kiss this left one near the heart' — she kissed it, mourning, 'Don't grieve, don't grieve, my heart bleeds for you'; and playing with the hand; while Hylda smiled at her, she asked, 'What are these dents in the flesh of the first and second fingers? — Funny. . . .'

" 'They are due to years of interval-stopping on the violin,' Hylda said.

" 'Of course, that's it. I have heard that you are a virtuoso, and I demand to hear you soon. Are you still at the College?'

" 'Nominally; but all that's over for me now, I'm afraid.'

" 'But why?'

" 'My father had no money to leave me, Miss O'Donague: I shall have to earn my living.'

"Up started Laura at this, dancing, clapping her palms, crying, 'Oh, how jolly!'

" 'Hardly for *me*,' said Hylda.

" 'For *me*, yes,' cried Laura. 'For that means you living with me! Do you know, I dreamed it? Yes, one night: and here it is, come to pass. Why, I want a companion! I have actually been inquiring ——'

" 'Miss O'Donague, you are very good ——'

" 'Call me Laura this instant!'

"Hylda looked at her with dimples in her smile, but said nothing.

" 'Why, how jolly!' cried Laura; 'just think, always to be together now, and we'll talk of Aubrey all day, and be good to each other, and bear with each other, and read each other's letters, and go incognito on sprees to Venice on our own, and down to Clanning — did Aubrey tell you about Clanning?'

" 'He told me,' said Hylda, 'and of that child lost down there. By the way, he had a most ludicrous story to tell me on the day before our wedding day about two men going to his flat and as good as charging him with having stolen the child. Has she been found, do you know?'

" 'I think not.'

" 'Aubrey said that the two men entered his flat and searched all through ——'

" 'Ah?' said Laura, smiling to herself with downcast eyes.

" 'Yes, and insisted that they had actually *heard* the child speaking in the flat.'

" 'Oh? . . . Poor old Aubrey! he was in for it those few days, wasn't he?'

" 'Haven't you heard anything of this incident before?'

" 'Well, yes, I think I heard something of it from — Barker,' and Laura jumped up anew from the sofa, opened a book on a table, looked at it, humming, cast it aside.

" 'She doesn't invariably utter everything that she is thinking,' thought Hylda; and she added aloud: 'To what could such a delusion of these officers have been due?'

"Laura pouted, asking: 'How can you be sure that it was a delusion?'

" 'Because there was no one at all in Aubrey's flat, so no one could have been heard in it!'

" 'I see. But since Detective-Sergeant Barker vows that he heard the child with his own ears in the flat, what answer can be made to that? Maybe Aubrey saw the child down at Clanning, fell in love with her, for she was very pretty, and — nicked her.'

" 'Miss O'Donague,' said Hylda very gravely, 'we seem to disagree on the subject of Aubrey; so perhaps we had better not talk much of him.'

" 'Meaning that I am in love.'

" 'Did I imply that?'

" 'You exhaled it. But when did Aubrey tell you about his little legacy? When did he say he was going to draw it?'

" 'He told me on the fourth day before the wedding day that he meant to draw it in two days' time,' answered Hylda.

" 'So his birthday was two days before the wedding day?'

" 'Birthday? What has his birthday to do with it?'

" 'So you don't know — *he never told you* — that the legacy was to be paid on his birthday?'

" 'I — no — you must be mistaken — he never mentioned it.'

"Hylda's eyes were so large with scare and amazement, that Laura leaped up laughing and could not help saying, 'What, are there things which Aubrey kept dark from you?'

"Hylda was dumb; spoke only with her eyes, which dwelt upon Laura with reproach.

" 'There, now I have wounded you,' said Laura ruefully, darting suddenly anew to her, 'because I am an ungenerous mean beast who kicks when one is down. . . . He forgot to mention it to you, that's all. You are so sensitive, so finely strung, and to bruise you is like trampling brutally upon a lute that breathes music to every breeze. . . . But, dear, it *is* so: he was to be paid on his birthdays, it was papa's whim. *When* is his birthday?'

" 'I — don't happen to know,' said Hylda in a maze; 'it must have been two days before the wedding day, since he said he was going to draw the legacy on that day.'

" 'No, it wasn't, then,' said Laura decisively: 'for the wedding day was in November, but it was not in November that he rescued Papa in the car: and that day was his birthday. It was, if I remember right, an evening in March.'

" 'He said that *that* night was his birthday?'

" 'Aye — told papa.'

" 'Then, that was why he brought me that specially large bouquet *that* Wednesday night. But why, why was he in black?' Hylda wondered.

"Laura, whirling a gold breloque about her forefinger, murmured, 'It is curious that he never told you, or that you never asked him, as to his birthday!'

"Hylda said, 'I have always had an instinct of anything which Aubrey did not wish to discuss, so never asked him that — not directly, that is; twice indirectly I have: but he never mentioned it.'

"But now, before she could say more, a footman, looking in, announced Detective-Sergeant Barker.

" 'Don't go,' Laura said to Hylda, 'Barker and I are pals — he says the Force missed something when I was born a woman.'

"Barker came in — a man who, though his grade in the police was not high, would have received a telegram addressed to 'Barker, London' — or to 'Rob Roy,' his name among the cracksmen, others of the 'gentry' naming him 'Old Moore.' Tallish, forty, agile, he had an agreeable smile beneath his mustache, and a wary gaze out of the tail of his eye. His teeth seemed excellent, but three in front were false, to replace the three knocked forty degrees inward by the maulers of 'Fred the Freak,' and that cheek-scar was from a stab by a Greek in a Soho club-raid. Since he had had occasion, some months before, to warn Laura with regard to her father's intimacy with the notorious Salvadora Rosa, or La Rosa, he had seen her several times in respect to various phases of the same matter; and she, fascinated by the extraordinary existence which this man lived, had sat chin on fist to hearken to histories of his hundred and one disguises as cab-driver, or street-artist, or weak-minded curate, of the clicking of the 'snips' on the wrists of the Dresden

bank-robbers, the Frameley forgers, famous 'receivers,' crib-crackers, of kind deeds done among those beasts of society, and tiger-struggles on the stairs of benighted lairs. In he now came, bowing, hat in hand, and Laura in her frank way gave him her hand, saw him seated, saying:

" 'You already know Miss Hood of the vanished bridegroom, Sergeant Barker?'

" 'I have that honor,' says Barker.

" 'We were just talking,' Laura remarked, hand on hip, with her saucy air, her dark hair parted at the side — 'this lady derides the idea that you heard anyone in Mr. Aubrey Smith's flat that day when, as you affirm, you heard the child in it.'

" 'A lady is invariably right,' the detective admitted.

" 'What did you hear the child say, if one may ask?' Hylda demanded, paying no attention to his politeness.

" 'Surely you may ask, Miss Hood. There was little to be heard, you understand, with a thick door between, but I distinctly heard a child utter the words: "*Now that I am seven years of age.*" As to that, I give you my word.'

" 'How miraculous this thing!' Hylda murmured. 'There was no one in the flat!'

" 'Mr. Aubrey Smith told you that, did he?' Barker asked.

" 'He told me of the incident, and did not tell me that there was anyone.'

" 'Negative evidence,' Barker laughed. 'To me, now, he admitted that there *was* someone in the flat, implying that it was a lady; but then I heard the child, and knew who it was.'

" '*Lady*,' Hylda breathed.

" 'You see now, Hylda' — from Laura: 'a detective, like a lady, is invariably right, except when a detective and a lady differ, and then both are sure to be wrong.'

" 'Did he — actually say that there was a lady?' Hylda asked.

" 'No,' said the detective, 'but he looked, or tried to look, shy when we came to the locked door ——'

" 'Locked door?' Hylda's eyes dropped.

" 'Ah, the incident of the locked door was never told you, I see,' said Barker; 'but it is well, Miss Hood, for us all to know what's what. I was allowed to look all through the flat, you see; but when it came to that locked room — ah, that was another affair; and it was "*there's someone in there*" in a whisper, with shy looks.'

"Laura, standing against a cabinet with her arms spread out like one crucified, and her head thrown back, looked down upon Hylda, contemplating her suffering; while Hylda, now quite gaunt, looked at the carpet.

" 'Never mind, dear,' said Laura; 'there's some explanation.'

"Suddenly Hylda flushed, and looking up with a smile, her eyes bravely met Laura's, as she said: 'I *know* that, Miss O'Donague'; then, turning to Barker, she asked: 'And you seriously believe, Sergeant Barker, that it was the lost child from Clanning that Mr. Smith had in that locked room?'

" 'I believe that it was, Miss Hood, and I know that it was *a* child.'

" 'Then, what do you say has become of this child?'

" 'Ah, there now you ask one of the most difficult questions of all in this extraordinary matter,' said Barker. 'The house, of course, was closely watched from that moment, and he never brought out the child — that we know; nor is the child now in the building: vanished is the word — unless the child whom I heard in his flat is the same child whom he shot; but, then, the shot child is foreign. . . . By the way, that's one of the questions I have to ask you now, Miss O'Donague: you know little Ada Price, and you have seen the wounded child in hospital: do you not see a likeness between the two?'

" 'It did not strike me,' Laura replied.

" 'Kindly look at little Ada's photo,' said Barker, producing it, and Laura, looking at it, now said: 'Yes, I do rather see it now: only the wounded child is much more beautiful.'

" 'Still, you notice that they are alike. . . . And now, Miss O'Donague, I must next say to you what will be greatly against the grain.'

" 'Oh?' said Laura. 'My grain or yours?'

" 'Both our grains.'

" 'Ah, they both run the same way. But I am dying to hear ——'

" 'Well, the Home Office has issued an order for the exhumation of your father's body.'

"Laura stood pale, then darting three steps at him with a face of wrath, 'You wouldn't dare!' she breathed.

" 'Now, do not take it to heart,' Detective-Sergeant Barker said gently. 'If it could be avoided, it wouldn't be done. But in the circumstances ——'

" 'What circumstances, pray, Sergeant?'

" 'Why, I have heard you hint yourself that he was poisoned!'

" 'I was not in the least serious,' Laura answered: 'a natural death! So why is this outrage perpetrated?'

" 'No, don't take it to heart — think of the circumstances: your father dies suddenly on the way home from Mr. Aubrey Smith's, where, as you yourself have told me, he had had something to drink; to Mr. Smith's he had gone from Madame Rosa's; to both Mr. Smith and to that lady, as we know, he has left sums of money, so that both stood to profit by his death.

" 'Oh, my poor Papa!' Laura mourned, falling into a sofa, her hands over her face.

"But neither anger nor grief could avail to change the process of the Government machine, and within some days, by the time Hylda's household effects had been sold, and Hylda herself was a part of Laura's household, the disinterred coffin of the old baronet lay open one Thursday morning in December under the eyes of the responsible persons.

"Never, maybe, did the eyes of men light on a wilder sight than those

eyes that day, on a more woeful, on a more bewildering. They refused to believe their five wits! That sight seemed to be an evil dream that one feels to be a dream:

"1. The baronet's throat was most brutally butchered right into the inner carotids, with gashes jagged as by some blunt cutter.

"2. His mouth was crowded full of some substance resembling powdered glass.

"3. In his stomach was discovered enough prussic acid to kill thirty persons.

"There," concluded my Uncle Quintus, "I have now given you by my method of narration far more information than Detective-Sergeant Barker had to go on at this point in the mystery. Indeed, I have provided you with sufficient clues to solve the problem, if you have the aptitude that you claim for such work. Tell me now, before we go up to bed, what do you make of these strange affairs?"

It was a wild night, rags of gusts tormented the tapestries, the flicker only of the fire lighted us. My uncle bent forward and applied a match to a three-branched candelabra. I arranged my few half-illegible notes on my knee and prepared to answer this formidable query.

"Uncle Quintus," I said, "as I see it, there are nine questions that need answering. If in each instance I surmise right, I should reach the same conclusion — the successful conclusion — that you tell me Detective-Sergeant Barker arrived at. Let me, first of all, read you my questions. I will then attempt to answer them.

"(1) What is the mystery of that 'strange and ominous date,' Aubrey Smith the First's birthday?

"(2) Who stole the black-haired, seven-year-old, Welsh, Ada Price from Clanning?

"(3) Was the O'Donague poisoned when he died in his car?

"(4) Is any significance to be attached to the death of Davenport, the butler?

"(5) Who is the black-haired, seven-year-old, French-speaking little girl found living with Aubrey Smith the Second in the squalid by-street near Russell Square?

"(6) Who uttered the phrase 'Now that I am seven years of age' from behind locked doors in Aubrey Smith the First's new flat?

"(7) Which Aubrey Smith shot the black-haired, seven-year-old, French-speaking little girl?

"(8) What happened to the two Aubrey Smiths subsequent to their chase on the young painter's wedding day?

"(9) What is the explanation of the atrocities revealed by the exhumation of the O'Donague?"

EDITOR'S NOTE: *Why don't you too accept Uncle Quintus's challenge? Can you deduce, determine — or, yes, divine — the answers to the nephew's nine questions? We use the word "divine" advisedly. As a verb, "divine" means to perceive through sympathy or intuition*

*— and that is perhaps what you will have to do to see all the truth behind Mr. Shiel's riddle. For remember that M. P. Shiel, that wonderful man, was unique: his "cases for deduction" were never cut-and-dried affairs, susceptible wholly to sheer and unadulterated logic. He always permitted a margin for imagination. As we once wrote of Mr. Shiel's work, he created a kind of rich and redolent romanticism; a kind of bizarre bravado, full of flamboyant and fantastic felony, wild and wilful wiliness. Take all this into account: allow for Shielesque shenanigans, both in the use of the English language and in the conception of ideas. Only thus can you match wits with that strange man and savor his stories to the deep . . .*

"Now, Uncle, if you will permit, I will expound. If it will not irritate you, I will tabulate my answers in just the same manner as I have tabulated my questions.

"These are my surmises. You can tell me, when I have done, exactly where I have gone astray.

"(1) Aubrey Smith the First was born on the 29th of February in Leap Year, and so only had a birthday every four years, which explains his despair over his legacy (since £175 every fourth year would not be sufficient to marry on) and his appeal that his namesake should collect his money annually for him. On that four-year birthday he wore mourning — perhaps because his birth had cost his mother her life?

"(2) Count Poldoff's emissaries stole Ada Price, since they had reason to believe that she resembled the child they were searching for. Once the opportunity presented itself, they intended substituting their prisoner for the Count's daughter.

"(3) The O'Donague was not poisoned when, to all appearance, he died in his car. He was neither poisoned nor dead! — was buried alive in a coma!

"(4) The death of Davenport, the butler, was a natural one; but there was a significance, I suspect, attached to it, a significance which I will explain in answering my last question.

"(5) The black-haired, seven-year-old, French-speaking little girl living in squalor with Aubrey the Second was Count Poldoff's daughter. Brought over by La Rosa from France, where for some years, no doubt, she had been educated and brought up as French in some obscure convent, she was entrusted by her mother to her agent, Aubrey Smith the Second. You will remember that La Rosa was abroad at the same time as the O'Donagues were in Italy; it was then, I think, that the child came to England. The fact that her mother was financially *embarassée* explains the squalor, too, of her agent's circumstances.

"(6) Aubrey Smith the First uttered 'Now that I am seven years of age' in his new flat — uttered it to Laura, who, in her unconventional way, was visiting him. He had let her know that his birthday was the 29th of February, and he meant by 'now that I am seven' that he had had seven birthdays — or rather six.

"(7) Aubrey Smith the Second

shot his little charge — unintentionally. Aubrey Smith the First's gun was unloaded when he dashed upstairs to take it, to intimidate his betrayer. The child, no doubt, got shot in some scuffle between the two. The initialed gun, of course, belonged to Aubrey Smith the Second, being probably a relic of his British-Indian Army days.

"(8) Aubrey Smith the Second flying before Aubrey Smith the First made for Regent's Park and La Rosa. Here he found sanctuary, and his pursuer, coming upon him, was seized and imprisoned by man-servants of La Rosa.

"(9) The atrocities on the body of the O'Donague were self-inflicted. Davenport the butler had placed in his master's coffin before interment a bottle of poison. The only significance of the butler's death is that when the exhumation took place he was not there to explain. Sir Phipps, I fancy, must once have been nearly buried alive in a coma, and so have made his old servant swear that whenever he was being buried, he, the butler, would put poison in the coffin. Sir Phipps must have waked in the grave, drank the poison. In his agony he ground the glass of the bottle in his teeth, and cut his throat with the broken glass. Barker may well have found a statement among the butler's papers to the effect that the butler placed the poison there.

"I think, Uncle, that these are the facts, which the police must have discovered. Hylda, I suppose, married her Aubrey the First when, on La Rosa's mansion being searched, that young man was released. Count Poldoff recovered his daughter from the Hospital. Laura retired to Clanning and painting."

My Uncle Quintus looked at me approvingly. "My boy," he said — and never before had he praised me so highly — "you are right in nearly everything: I am pleased to note that you have the family brain. And now to bed. A cuneiform stele's due from Khosabad tomorrow: you will give me your views on that."

# DR. ALEXANDER O. GETTLER, REAL-LIFE DETECTIVE

*by EDWARD D. RADIN*

THE LABORATORY of Dr. Alexander O. Gettler, city toxicologist, is a huge room which looks like something a surrealist designed after a bad night. Green and yellow bottles bubble over Bunsen burners. The fluid in a beaker turns blue and then red. Human bones that glow in the dark decorate a wall panel. Nearby is a bottle of poisoned liquor with which Ruth Snyder hoped to eliminate her paramour, Judd Gray, after he had helped her murder her husband. Strange death weapons form a neat pattern in a glass case. All of these are reminders of the part Dr. Gettler, a short, stocky man, has played in prominent murder cases in New York City.

To most New Yorkers Dr. Gettler is simply a name that pops up in the newspapers during murder investigations with the notation that vital organs have been sent to him for examination. Hardly anybody knows just what that means or just what Dr. Gettler does. Few people have ever seen him; he never goes to the scene of a crime and his courtroom appearances are rare. Yet Dr. Gettler is one of the world's greatest detectives and has sent more killers to the chair than any other one person in the city . . .

Dr. Gettler performed one of his greatest feats when he broke the Alibi of the 22 Dancing Beauties. For months it appeared to be the perfect crime. Police thought they knew the killer but were unable to prove their case. Dr. Gettler solved the murder with a few grains of sand and seed.

It was on Monday morning, November 2, 1942, when the body of a slim, attractive brunette was found in a shallow ditch in Central Park, in a section which had been allowed to grow wild. At first it didn't appear to be murder. There were no signs of violence on the body and it looked as if the woman had suddenly dropped dead and fallen into the ditch. Her oval face was peaceful and the bright polish on her nails wasn't chipped. An autopsy revealed, however, that the girl had been strangled Sunday night. The shrewd murderer had pressed his fingers on a certain part of the windpipe, causing the girl to lose consciousness quickly and without a struggle.

After a delay the victim was identified by her father as Mrs. Louisa Almadovar, 23. The father told police that she was estranged from her husband, Anibal (Terry) Almadovar. Louisa had left home late Sunday afternoon after receiving a telephone

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call. She dressed with great care, told her parents that she was going out on a dinner date, and laughed aside all questions as to whom she was meeting. Her father walked with her to the subway station. That was the last time she was seen alive by any witnesses police were able to locate.

Detectives checked on Almadovar and found he was a popular figure in the Spanish quarter of Harlem. A slight, dapper youth, he was an excellent dancer and the uncrowned rumba king of the dance-hall set. Women pursued him. He had married Louisa after a brief courtship and their marriage lasted just five weeks. Police wondered if he had been jealous of her for going out on a date and had murdered her. They soon learned that it was the other way around. Louisa had been jealous of him — and had fought with two of his girl friends only several weeks before she was killed.

The two women were rounded up and police tried the old trick of pitting one against the other in the hope that some information would come to light. Each insisted that she knew nothing about the murder. Then the two women were placed together in a room with a dictaphone, but instead of quarreling they sat and discussed clothes. The weary detectives reasoned that Mrs. Almadovar would not have accompanied either of them to that lonely spot in the park, that the killer had to be somebody she knew and trusted. The women were released.

An Army sergeant who had been pestering Louisa for dates was picked up for questioning. He was visibly nervous as the officers hammered questions at him, but the reason for this was soon evident. He was a draft evader, wearing a stolen uniform.

Almadovar had called on his wife only once after their separation and this was to warn her not to bother his girl friends. His father-in-law had ordered him out of the house. The dapper dancer, however, had the best alibi of any of the suspects. Although he had been in a dance hall not far from the park the night of the murder, 22 girls said he had danced with them that night. This accounted for every single dance covering the time of the murder.

Attempts to shake the stories of the girls proved futile. Police found themselves engulfed in blondes, brunettes, and redheads, all above average in looks and figure. Because there were too many of them to plot an alibi, the officers were convinced the women weren't lying.

"Whatever it is, he has it," a detective commented.

But as suspect after suspect was cleared, detectives kept returning to Almadovar. One of Louisa's girl friends related an interesting story about a party attended by the couple shortly before they were married. The conversation somehow had drifted around to murder and Almadovar said that it was easy to kill a person. He asked Louisa to stand up and held two fingers against her throat for only

a few seconds. She fell down in a faint. The police were convinced now that Almadovar was their man but they saw no way to prove it.

They felt sure that it was Terry who had telephoned Louisa and lured her away from her home. Otherwise, they reasoned, she wouldn't have hesitated to tell her father whom she was going to meet. Almadovar was arrested as a material witness and placed in a cell in the hope that he would crack. After a siege of daily questioning he deliberately butted his head against a cell wall and was sent to a hospital, but he still kept silent and was released.

Then Dr. Gettler entered the case. The police gave him a green suit Almadovar had worn on the night of the murder. Dr. Gettler examined the suit and carefully brushed some dirt from the trouser legs. When he was finished, he had a few grains of sand in an envelope. He also brushed out a few fragments of dry leaf and several small black dots from the trouser cuffs.

For the next few days he was busy with microscope, magnifying glass, and his books. He called for a photograph of the death scene in the park, made an enlargement, and studied the vegetation. One of the barely visible black dots taken from the green suit interested him and he spent hours studying it and the photograph.

Finally he issued a series of orders that bewildered the detectives. One of them dug a hole in the ditch where the body had been found, placed the dirt in a sterile pail, and took it to the laboratory. Another solemnly paced off a hundred yards from the ditch, scratched up some dirt, and went through the same procedure. Altogether, six holes were dug in different parts of the park. In addition, one of the men who lived in Brooklyn was ordered to bring in some dirt from his own backyard.

Dr. Gettler placed the dirt in a large box that resembled a coffin and began burning it. He also was not neglecting the black dots and fragments of leaf. These were placed on slides and microphotographs were made of them.

Several weeks slipped by while Dr. Gettler quietly worked with his assistants. The murder had long slipped from the pages of the newspapers and had been forgotten. Suddenly interest was revived. Dr. Gettler telephoned police and instructed them to arrest Almadovar. Despite the alibi of the 22 dancers Terry had murdered his wife.

Almadovar vehemently denied the charge and demanded an early trial. His wish was granted. The dapper dancer took the witness stand and denied having seen his wife in weeks. Asked specifically when he last was in Central Park, he replied not for at least two years.

The stage was set for Dr. Gettler. On the witness stand he reported on his experiments. He said that the black dots he had found in the cuff of Almadovar's trousers were grass

seeds, but not ordinary grass seeds. He was certain that they were seeds of the plant *dicoth milleflorium*, not usually found in the New York area. The enlargement of the death-scene photograph clearly showed *dicoth milleflorium* growing alongside the ditch where the body was found.

The seeds in the cuffs were one-fiftieth of an inch shorter than the normal seeds for this kind of grass. Dr. Gettler sent a botanist to the scene to collect some seeds there. These, too, were one-fiftieth of an inch shorter than normal.

Next Dr. Gettler took up the question of the sand brushed from Almadovar's trousers. The large box in which he had burned the dirt was a spectograph machine, which is used to determine what elements are contained in the material that is burned. The machine showed that the grains of sand taken from the trousers matched exactly with the dirt from the ditch. Samples of dirt taken from the other six spots in the park, including the one just one hundred yards away, differed greatly. The matching seeds and dirt meant that Almadovar had not only been in Central Park but *at the death scene.*

The alibi verified by the 22 dancing partners was easily explained. True, Almadovar had not missed a dance, but there had been several short intermissions. During one of these he had slipped out of a bathroom window, dashed across to the park, strangled his wife, hurried back to the dance hall for the next dance.

When Dr. Gettler finished testifying, a jury required exactly three minutes to find the dancer guilty of first-degree murder.

As he was being sentenced, Almadovar made a frenzied attempt to break away, shouting Dr. Gettler's name. The chemist was not in court. He was busy preparing a case against another killer who thought he was too clever to be caught.

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# *THE ONLY FORMULA*

*At the time Miriam Bruce submitted "Dear Louisa" to EQMM's Third Annual Contest, in which her story won an Honorable Mention, Miss Bruce was a member of Dashiell Hammett's Mystery Story class. This is the second story, therefore, that we have purchased from students of Mr. Hammett's course . . . Miss Bruce was born in Manhattan. She is an alumna of the University of Michigan. For a couple of years she courted the theatre, then took to writing "confessions" and other "hack work" — to support her passion for the footlights. In World War II she served overseas in the American Red Cross.*

*For the first quarter-century of her life she had no intention whatever of becoming a writer. One day she "trifled" with the idea, became interested, began to "write things down," and winced when she read what she had written. Finally, she came to the conclusion that she really had something to say — then she realized that she "was done for."*

*She started writing short stories. A few were bought by "little" magazines, many were not; the financial difference between a story being accepted by a "little" magazine and being rejected was so small that it hardly mattered, but Miss Bruce persevered — she liked to see her name in print. After some success with pulp stories Miss Bruce awoke one morning to discover herself not famous but firmly resolved to write thenceforth only what she pleased — and hang the consequences. "I had had time," she confided to your Editor, "to get only a little nervous when a portent appeared in the form of Ellery Queen offering to buy a crime story that I had written because it pleased me to write it."*

*For years Miss Bruce had been reading mystery stories with great appetite, although invariably she had been unable to understand the explanations at the end. This proved a severe handicap not only in her reading but in her attempts to write. She circumvented it neatly: in her own mystery stories she works out the plots so that there is no necessity for an explanation at the end. In her first shots at detective fiction she spent a lot of time looking for a formula: the results were noticeably confused. She found that she did much better when she began to write out of character, as one writes any other kind of story. Perhaps, says Miss Bruce, there really is a formula — so many people insist there is! — but Miss Bruce has yet to discover it.*

*No, there is no formula for the detective-crime story — at least, no formula which, on pushing this button and pulling out that stop, manufactures the priceless ingredients of freshness, imagination, and integrity. The only formula for a truly creative writer is simply this: do not be afraid — aim high, and when you have adjusted your sights, aim higher still!*

# DEAR LOUISA

*by MIRIAM BRUCE*

Broome Park, Mass.
April 5th

Dear Louisa,

You will no doubt be surprised to hear from me after all these years, particularly since we parted with some coldness. However, I trust that by now you have forgotten our small misunderstanding. Actually, it was not I who was responsible for the foreclosure on your home, but Father who had somehow got the idea that you had done me an injustice.

I have decided to resume our friendship, Louisa. Obviously it will have to be limited to correspondence as my maid, Martha, informs me that you, too, are confined to your room by illness. Dr. Low has assured me that an outside interest will divert my mind from poor Grosvenor, and although I have learned over a period of years never to take Stephen Low's advice, I confess I am curious to learn how you were able to purchase your house back. My Martha has been informed by your maid that you never married. Frankly, Louisa, I am surprised. You were always so interested in men.

Recalling your past high-handedness, Louisa, I suppose there is the possibility that you will not wish to enter into correspondence with me. However, I hope the passage of years has made you more sensible. Whatever your shortcomings, you are a Porter and a member of my own generation. Let's let bygones be bygones. You may consider this an apology if you wish.

Martha will carry this note to you and will call for any communication you may care to make in return.

Your friend and schoolmate,
SARAH GROSVENOR BEACH

Broome Park
April 7th

Dear Louisa,

I must confess I recall nothing amusing in my letter to you. Nevertheless, I was pleased to receive your reply and suppose I must accept your rather odd sense of humor as part of you that the years have had no power to change.

You describe your heart condition as "something between a murmur and a shout." It seems to me that you are treating the situation with undue lightness, considering that your mother and your paternal grandfather both succumbed to heart disease.

My own trouble is nervous and I attribute it completely to Harley's selfish and callous action. My health started to fail not long after he took his life, and in the past twenty years has continued to decline. However, I am glad to say that I still anticipate

many years of life . . . glad, not so much on my own account as for the sake of Grosvenor, who unhappily inherits all of his father's weakness and none of his charm.

Dr. Low insists that I am a victim of myasthenia, a newfangled muscular disorder which he claims is fatal if not treated. When he first presented this absurd diagnosis five years ago, I went to the trouble of reading a number of medical books on the subject. I found that Stephen Low was completely wrong. It seems that myasthenia attacks the muscles, particularly about the throat and eyes, and induces extreme fatigue. It is true that I am subject to attacks of weariness, but that is entirely due to nervous strain. As for my eyes, they have always been bad. So were Father's and Grandfather's.

Nevertheless, Dr. Low, unwilling to admit he is mistaken, persists in submitting me to a daily injection of something he calls prostigmin. I am perfectly aware that this is all an elaborate mummery; I have seen the contents of the hypodermic and know them to be nothing but distilled water, or at most a harmless tonic. I have tried more than once to find another physician, but each has proved more incompetent than the last, and in spite of Dr. Low's stubbornness, I can at least be assured of his personal interest in me.

Dear me, Louisa, it must be over twenty years since you last saw Stephen Low. He hasn't changed a great deal. He's completely gray, of course, but as slovenly and careless as ever and still characterized by that rather pointless brand of humor you used to find so amusing. He's worn the same baggy pepper-and-salt tweeds for the past ten years, not from motives of thrift which would be understandable, but out of sheer indifference. You will be interested to learn that he still offers marriage to me. I must confess that I find considerable comfort in the fact that someone values me, even if it's only Stephen Low.

Weariness compels me to lay down my pen, Louisa. Perhaps I shall feel strong enough to resume it after luncheon.

*Later*

Really, Grosvenor has grown more impossible every day. I had hoped that in spite of his difficult childhood he might become a credit to me, but at thirty-four he still exhibits his early traits of weakness and lack of stamina. I try to be patient with him because of his infirmity. I cannot imagine why he should have contracted poliomylitis as an infant; certainly none of the men in my family have been anything but excellent physical specimens.

Grosvenor's single charm — his exact physical resemblance to his father — is of course marred by his crippled leg. His posture is still bad in spite of the fact that I insisted upon his wearing a brace throughout most of his childhood to correct it.

His most maddening trait is a continual conviction that he is ill —

which of course he is not. He is always discovering new symptoms in himself and seeking cures for them. His recent addiction is to a type of capsule that he carries in a small, green bottle in his pocket. Dr. Low assures me that the capsules are harmless.

Grosvenor's weaknesses might be forgivable if he were an affectionate or dutiful son. He is neither. For example, he was nearly a quarter of an hour late to our reading hour today. His excuse when he finally limped in was that he had fallen asleep. I don't believe he had fallen asleep at all. I believe he was out of the house somewhere. This is the second time he's been late this week. Certainly he should have no doubt as to what time I expect him after twelve years of holding our little reading hour daily.

Then when he began his reading — we are re-doing Walter Pater — he seemed a million miles away. I do hope he hasn't sold another of his stories to that ridiculous little quarterly. About twice a year they accept one of his sketches and he is utterly unmanageable for months afterwards. He read his first-published story aloud to me. I should be the first to be proud of anything creditable that Grosvenor did, but this story was without plot and the characters were completely untrue to life . . . a selfish woman who drove her husband to suicide and their crippled, ineffectual son. Honesty compelled me to tell Grosvenor he had no talent whatsoever. He became quite sulky and never again mentioned his work to me. If it weren't that Martha keeps me informed, I should be completely unaware of what he is doing.

The money Grosvenor receives for these stories is not, apparently, sufficient to maintain him. He still lives on the income which I have assigned him — subject to my supervision, of course. I am convinced that if he could afford it, he would leave my house without a qualm. You no doubt realize how difficult it is for me to admit that my own son is lacking in affection for me, but I'm afraid that Grosvenor resembles his father morally as well as in person.

Well, Louisa, a woman as ill as you should not be obliged to listen to an account of an undutiful son. How fortunate you are that your last days are peaceful!

Your friend,
SARAH GROSVENOR BEACH

Broome Park
April 8th

Dear Louisa,

I have discovered why Grosvenor has been acting so strangely lately. It seems unbelievable, but he has become involved with a woman.

I am too disturbed to write more than a brief note now. I shall give you a full account of any action I decide upon. Really, Louisa, it's amazing how much closer I feel to you than I did years ago, even before our little difficulty.

I enjoyed your letter, particularly the account of Julia Dollard's funeral. But what did you mean by saying,

"Thanks for your commiseration on my heart-gallop, but would you please omit flowers until absolutely necessary?"

Your friend,
SARAH GROSVENOR BEACH

Broome Park
April 9th

Dear Louisa,

Well, let me start from the beginning. As I told you yesterday, I discovered that Grosvenor has been carrying on with some woman. This, after consideration, was less surprising than it seemed to me at first. Certainly the Grosvenor name and money could not fail to attract a woman. As for Grosvenor, this involvement merely makes the resemblance between him and his father complete.

I have never told you this, Louisa — after all, we have only recently been on intimate terms — but shortly before my husband's death I had evidence that there was another woman. I know this must seem incredible; nevertheless it is true. I began to suspect something soon after I induced Harley to abandon his absurd idea of being a concert pianist and to go into Father's office. He began to spend evenings away from home, and although his excuse was that he was playing chess with Dr. Low, I wasn't deceived. One day I was able to confront him with evidence — I found in his pocket a handkerchief scented with cheap violet cologne.

Harley didn't even show the good taste of denying my allegations, and went so far as to tell me he loved this other woman and wished me to divorce him. Naturally, I refused and told him that unless he terminated the connection I should not allow him to see Grosvenor again. He capitulated, of course.

I have never had an instant's doubt that my procedure was the correct one, not only for my sake and Grosvenor's but for Harley's as well. After that incident his conduct was unexceptionable; he ceased trying to cross me at every turn and our married life was perfectly happy — until the night he shot himself.

I am giving you this background, Louisa, so that you'll understand why I was not surprised when Martha reported to me that Grosvenor, like his father before him, had allowed himself to be ensnared by a woman of the most unacceptable type.

I am an extraordinarily perceptive person, Louisa. I was made immediately aware by Martha's attitude the other day that she had news for me. She came into the room with her eyes sparkling and her lips compressed.

It seems that Grosvenor has been seeing this young woman for nearly two months. Her name is Mary Trent. She is a New Yorker and has been brought to Broome Park to catalogue the new Higgins Collection at the Public Library. This is what comes of importing outside labor.

Martha assured me that Luke Spivens told her that Grosvenor is seen in this young woman's company constantly. (You remember Luke,

don't you, Louisa? The handyman at the library — a very worthy and reliable old person. I was instrumental in inducing the Library Board to grant him a rise in salary fourteen years ago.) Luke told Martha that Grosvenor calls on this young woman at her lodging house, that they lunch together frequently, and that only last week Miss Trent was seen wearing a nosegay of violets pinned to her dress. Violets! Like father, like son!

Can you imagine the duplicity of this, Louisa? Apparently, everyone in Broome Park learned of Grosvenor's *amour* before his mother did. You can imagine my distress. This afternoon I was so exhausted I could barely lift my field glasses to look out of the window. When I complained to Dr. Low, all he did was to increase my dose of prostigmin. Useless, of course. However, I am feeling better now.

Your friend,
SARAH GROSVENOR BEACH

Broome Park
April 11th

Dear Louisa,

I have seen the woman.

Our reading hour today was farcical. Grosvenor kept interrupting himself to glance at his watch and didn't even stop at the passages I had marked for discussion. When I asked him if he had a more pressing engagement — satirically, of course — he pretended not to hear. I was tempted to dismiss him, but for the sake of discipline decided to endure his mumblings for the allotted time.

Long before the hour was over he rose and closed the book. With considerable patience I reminded him that it lacked four minutes of three o'clock. He looked at his watch and reluctantly seated himself. I felt that he should be taught a lesson. "You've hurried over the marked passages," I told him. "Would you be so good as to repeat them slowly?"

My patent displeasure seemed to have not the slightest effect on him. As he was leaving the room at three twenty, I gave him a last chance to abandon his deceitful attitude. "Is there something you'd like to tell me, Grosvenor?" I asked. For a moment his expression was so much like his father's that I was startled. He smiled in that dreadful, secretive way that Harley had and said, "No, Mother, there's nothing I'd like to tell you." I heard him whistling as he hurried down the stairs, and I noted with surprise that he had left his green bottle of capsules on my table.

In a moment Martha came into the room. "If you want to see why he was in such a rush," she told me, "just look out the window." Without pausing to reprimand Martha for eavesdropping on the reading hour — she always has since the day Grosvenor brought home the book by that dreadful D. H. Lawrence — I summoned my energy and walked to the window.

Through my field glasses I saw Grosvenor limping swiftly toward a young woman who came forward to meet him. "She's been waiting on the

corner of Spruce and Summit since three o'clock," Martha told me. "She was there last Saturday, too."

Louisa, this person has nothing to recommend her. She is plain, badly dressed, utterly lacking in style, and very nearly Grosvenor's own age. In feature she rather resembles yourself, and she has a quantity of brown hair pulled back from her face with unbecoming simplicity.

Their exhibition on meeting was disgusting. She held out her hand and Grosvenor shook it rather formally. Then he grasped her left hand as well, behaving more like a schoolboy than a man of thirty four, and they stood clasping hands in the middle of Spruce Street. Grosvenor said something and Miss Trent laughed, for what reason I couldn't determine. After a moment Grosvenor began to laugh, too. Then he took her arm and they walked off toward Summit Avenue.

This simply cannot go on. I intend to take steps immediately.

Your friend,
SARAH GROSVENOR BEACH

Broome Park
April 12th

Dear Louisa,

I have just been subjected to a frightful scene. I am utterly exhausted. Only the fact that I am completely in the right gives me the strength to go on.

I resolved to confront Grosvenor with my knowledge of his connection with this woman at our reading hour today. Knowing only too well how rebellious my son is to guidance from myself, I decided to enlist the aid of Dr. Low, whom for some reason Grosvenor respects. After luncheon I sent Martha to summon him.

I must admit Stephen Low arrived promptly. He burst into the room, his face pale and his coat unbuttoned. He stared in astonishment as he saw me sitting upright on the *chaise longue.* "For God's sake, Sarah," he said, not very cordially, "what's all this about? Martha told me you'd had an attack."

I knew very well what Martha had told him. "Sit down, Stephen," I said. "This is important."

"So are my patients, regardless of what you seem to think." However, he sat down and gave me his attention. He glanced at my new, blue dressing gown and my hair which I'd had Martha dress high especially for the occasion. "Well, my imperishable Sarah, what job do you have for me this time?" he asked. "Is there a grave you want robbed, or merely an old friend to be quietly put out of the way?"

I ignored his tasteless humor. "I have discovered that Grosvenor is involved with a woman, Stephen. I intend to talk to him about it today. I need your help."

"Do I understand that you want me to give Grosvenor a belated talk on the facts of life?"

Naturally, I ignored the question. I would have given Dr. Low an idea of what I planned to say, but at that instant Grosvenor knocked.

Louisa, I wish I could tell you that

my son denied the charges with which I confronted him. But I cannot. When I was finished, Grosvenor said, "Let me congratulate you, Mother. For once you seem to be right about something."

Dr. Low opened his mouth to remonstrate, but I signaled him to be silent. "May I ask if you're planning to marry this woman?" I inquired.

Grosvenor looked at me defiantly. "If she'll have me, yes. I haven't asked her yet."

What a relief it was to me that the affair had not yet reached the stage of betrothal! I knew that gentle firmness on my part could still avert catastrophe.

"My dear boy," I said, with considerable sympathy in my tone, "I see that the time has come when Dr. Low and I must talk to you very seriously about the state of your health."

Dr. Low gave me a startled glance but fortunately Grosvenor didn't see it. He stared at me, apprehension dawning in his face. I pursued my advantage. "Out of consideration for your feelings, Grosvenor, Dr. Low has kept it from you but, frankly, you will never be well enough to marry."

Suddenly Grosvenor covered his face with his hands. I realized that our battle was nearly won. "If you really care for this young woman, you won't burden her with someone who might well end his days as an invalid," I pointed out reasonably, and made a gesture indicating to Dr. Low that he was free to corroborate what I had said. I had no wish for him to lie, of course. What I had told Grosvenor might very possibly be so. Who can predict the future?

Louisa, you simply will not credit what happened next. Stephen Low, my friend of half a century's standing, the man who had always claimed to care for me, a physician whose first duty is surely toward his patient, stood there and calmly gave me the lie!

"That's utter nonsense, Sarah," he said. "There's not a thing wrong with Grosvenor except acute hypochondriasis."

Grosvenor's hands were trembling as he took them from his face. "You're sure?" he said.

Dr. Low put his arm around Grosvenor's shoulders. I could have slapped them both. "Of course I'm sure! It's just your mother's imagination working overtime again. She worries about you too much."

Grosvenor laughed unpleasantly. "Is that it, Mother?" he asked. "Do you worry about me too much? Is all this sheer excess of mother love?"

Dr. Low tried to protest, but Grosvenor turned savagely and limped toward the door. He left without even saying goodbye.

Louisa, I must admit to you that at this point I nearly became panic-stricken. It seemed highly possible that Dr. Low, by his stupidity, had driven Grosvenor straight into the arms of this woman. When Stephen Low turned to me and said, "Sometimes I wonder about these little blind

spots of yours, Sarah," I lost control of myself completely. I told him to leave my house and never to return.

He laughed that infuriatingly inane laugh of his and reached in his bag for his hypodermic needle. "Hate to be caught, don't you, Sarah? Roll up that pretty sleeve. It's time for your injection."

I repeated my orders to him. He stared at me as though I could not possibly be serious.

"I've endured your incompetence long enough," I told him. "I've kept you on mostly out of pity for you. You've repaid me with disloyalty of the worst sort. Now I want you to leave."

I could tell that I'd hit the mark. "I had no idea that my dog-like devotion was so offensive to you, Sarah," he said. "I'll relieve you of it as soon as you find another doctor. Meanwhile, you'd better have your injection."

I am a difficult woman to deceive, Louisa. I was completely aware that his motive in insisting upon the injection was to try to prove to me that he was indispensable. He failed, of course.

I looked him squarely in the eye. "You're wasting your efforts, Stephen. I know very well that that hypodermic contains nothing but distilled water."

He simulated astonishment.

"Will you go, please?" I said. "I'm very tired. This unfortunate scene has completely exhausted me."

"It's your disease that's exhausted you, Sarah," he said brutally. "If you don't let me give you the prostigmin, you'll probably be dead by morning."

A lesser woman might have allowed herself to be blackmailed. I did not. "Spare me the embarrassment of having to send Martha for the police to remove you," I said coldly.

Well, Louisa, he finally left. I rang for Martha who told me that Grosvenor had left the house and gone in the direction of the library. I have spent the remainder of the afternoon in a state of agitation. Writing to you has calmed me a little. It is nearly dinner time now, and I find that I grow momentarily more tired. Six o'clock is striking. There is a good deal more that I should like to say to you but my hand is trembling from fatigue and I have a feeling of obstruction in my chest. The price of conscience.

Your friend,
SARAH GROSVENOR BEACH

Broome Park
April 14th

Dear Louisa,

How good it is to be alive! The sun is streaming in through my window and outside I can hear the laughter of children. I very nearly left all this, Louisa. Fortunately I'm better now, although this can be only a short note as Dr. Low has warned me against overexerting myself.

I must confess that I misjudged Stephen Low. He is my truest and most loyal friend, and if it were not for him I should not be here.

Shortly after I sent Martha out to deliver my last letter to you — there are some things in that letter, Louisa, that are perhaps slightly exaggerated — I began to feel very strange. My hands trembled and my breathing became difficult. I lay back among the pillows and gradually a dreadful, cold lassitude began to creep over me. I was completely unable to move my limbs, and lay there helplessly praying that Martha might speedily return. At last I heard her key in the door, but I hadn't even the strength to pull the bell cord to summon her. I heard her go into the kitchen and commence to prepare my dinner. I gathered all my strength and tried to call out. It was impossible. My breathing became shallower and shallower. Finally, with one last effort, I managed to push the glass off the table at my elbow. For a moment there was silence in the kitchen below and I thought Martha heard. Then the clatter of dishes began again. Consciousness started to fade from me. The last thing I remember is a peremptory ringing of the doorbell and Stephen Low's voice in the downstairs hall.

Well, Louisa, you have guessed it. Dr. Low's diagnosis was correct after all. I am a victim of myasthenia. I must admit that it was a considerable shock for me to learn this. However, Dr. Low assures me that I can still look forward to many years of life with the aid of my daily injection of prostigmin.

Louisa, you've no idea what effect being near to death has on the human spirit. I have a whole new perspective on everything. I feel that I must be worthy of the Providence that has spared me. I have told Martha that from now on instead of saving the bread crusts to make pudding, she is to spread them for the birds.

Your friend,

SARAH GROSVENOR BEACH

P.S.: I have thought of a plan that will once and for all end Grosvenor's relationship with this impossible young woman.

Broome Park
April 15th

Dear Louisa,

Thank you for your sympathetic letter and for the bouquet. Violets are not my favorite flower, but I am sure you meant the gift kindly.

I am feeling very well today. Martha has been called home for a few days because of her sister's illness, and Grosvenor is looking after me. He is inept and stupid, but at least his duties keep him in the house.

I have disposed of the woman.

My plan was simplicity itself. I'm amazed that I didn't think of it sooner. I merely wrote a short note to Lambert Jones — you will remember Lambert from dancing school; he was the clumsy one with the small head; he is now president of the First National Bank and head of the Library Board. I told Lambert that I wished him to dismiss Mary Trent instantly and send her back to where she came from. I anticipated no difficulty with Lambert — Father's investments took

care of that — and of course there was none. Martha was back within the hour with a message that my request would be complied with and that Lambert himself would put Miss Trent on the six o'clock train to New York. She is undoubtedly on her way to the station at this moment.

Excuse me, Louisa. There is a ringing on the downstairs bell and Grosvenor has gone to open the door. I wonder who it can be. I am not expecting Dr. Low until four.

*Later*

Louisa, you will find what I am about to tell you nearly incredible. I never, never would have believed such effrontery possible — even from a New Yorker.

I heard Grosvenor open the door and give an exclamation of surprise. A female voice, with an accent that I can only describe as common, said, "Where's your mother's room, Grosvenor? I want to talk to her."

I heard the sound of footsteps running up the stairs and a peremptory knock. The door burst open.

Yes, Louisa, you have guessed it. It was the Trent woman.

She neither waited for Grosvenor to introduce us nor inquired after my health. "Why did you have me fired from my job, Mrs. Beach?" she demanded.

She didn't wait for an answer but went on to inform me that denials on my part were useless since Lambert Jones had admitted that it was I who had requested the dismissal. You can imagine the effect of all this on Grosvenor. He looked at me as though had he dared, he would have struck me.

I decided to take a firm stand. "You have been a pernicious influence on my son, Miss Trent," I said. "My decision is final. Your coming here to plead with me to reverse it is quite useless."

Besides being insolent, Miss Trent is a fool. As she heard my last words she suddenly burst into laughter. She laughed until I began to fear that I had an hysterical woman in my bedroom. Then she stopped and wiped her eyes.

"Bless you," she said at last, "you're straight out of the Boston Museum, aren't you? I assure you I haven't come here to plead with you. In fact, now that I think of it, I'm not sure what I did come for." She turned to Grosvenor and there suddenly were tears in her eyes. The woman is obviously a consummate actress. "Goodbye, Grosvenor," she said. "Thanks for all the violets."

I saw a look of indecision creeping into Grosvenor's eyes. I hunted desperately about for some way of forcing the woman to leave, but I could think of none short of calling the police, and as you know, Louisa, I do not have a telephone. Grosvenor limped toward her and put his hands on her arms. "I can't let you go," he said fatuously. "Mary, I can't let you go."

"Why don't you come with me?" she asked. The woman was utterly brazen. She took a step toward him

and God knows what would have happened with me lying there on the *chaise longue* helpless to intervene when there was a knock on the door and Dr. Low came into the room.

"Take this woman away, Stephen," I directed. "My symptoms are increasing."

I should have known better than to expect Stephen Low to behave intelligently in a crisis. He glanced questioningly from Grosvenor to the woman and Grosvenor seized the opportunity to make a number of accusations against me.

Dr. Low turned to me with a look of injured surprise. "Sarah, you actually had Miss Trent fired?"

I was not in a mood to listen to moralizing from Stephen Low. "Don't be stupid, Stephen," I said with perhaps unwarranted candor. "I was perfectly willing to handle the situation in a manner that could not possibly have harmed Miss Trent, but you refused to support me." I turned to Grosvenor. "Are you determined to marry this woman?"

"Yes, I am, Mother," Grosvenor replied rather unsteadily.

"Very well," I said. "Of course I can't stop you. May I ask what you plan to live on?"

"My income."

"That will be stopped. I am still executrix of your grandfather's estate."

"I can work," he said.

I looked at his useless leg and smiled. I'm sure you understand, Louisa, that I was being cruel only to be kind. "Can you?" I asked him.

"We'll get along," said Miss Trent. But I noticed that Grosvenor was silent. "Come along, darling," she said. I detest indiscriminate endearments.

"Just one thing more," I added. It was apparent to me that Grosvenor was once more caught in his usual panic of weak-kneed indecision. "It's only fair to warn you, Grosvenor, that tomorrow I shall change my will. Since you have ceased to behave toward me as a son, I see no reason why you should reap the benefits of one."

Miss Trent pretended complete indifference. But the effect on Grosvenor was what I had expected. He looked from the woman to me and back to the woman again. Then he reached in his pocket for the green bottle and hastily gobbled a pill.

Miss Trent, who appears to be possessed of a certain shrewdness where her own interests are concerned, grasped Grosvenor's arm. "Don't be a fool, Grosvenor!" she said. "The money doesn't make any difference."

Grosvenor pushed his hair back from his forehead. I recognized the gesture. He had acknowledged defeat. "I'm sorry, Mary," he said.

Well, the long and short of it is that Grosvenor did at last regain his senses. The woman argued, of course, but to no avail. I kept completely out of the discussion so that Grosvenor could make his own decision, and offered no further comment except to remind Miss Trent that if she didn't hurry

she would miss her train. When she left I suggested that Grosvenor see her to the station. I wanted to impress him with the fact that I was not being unreasonable.

By the time they left I was beginning to feel rather tired. It was past time for my injection, and besides I was experiencing the fatigue that one feels after a hard-won victory in a just cause.

When the door closed behind them, I turned my attention to Dr. Low. Louisa, I was shocked at the man's appearance! He had collapsed into a chair and his hands were covering his face.

"Stephen," I said, "What is it? Are you ill?" You may be sure that I was very disturbed at his attitude, not only because it was time for my injection but also out of personal concern for him.

He did not reply to my question but raised his face from his hands. He looked very haggard and for the first time it occurred to me that Stephen Low is getting to be an old man. "Why did you do that, Sarah?" he demanded.

I had no intention of justifying my actions to Stephen Low. I simply pointed out that what I had done had been entirely for Grosvenor's own good. "Furthermore," I continued, "I've given my whole life to Grosvenor, and I don't see why he should cavalierly abandon me in my old age."

Dr. Low merely sat there silently, his expression that of a man who has suffered a great shock. I could not and cannot now imagine why he was so upset. "Some day Grosvenor will thank me for ending this unfortunate relationship," I said reasonably. "I have merely protected him from his own susceptibility, just as I did his father."

To illustrate my point, I told Dr. Low how I had handled Harley's deviation. When I had finished he said slowly, "I suppose I always knew it was something like that that made Harley do it."

"Nonsense," I said. "Harley wasn't in his right mind when he committed suicide. Everyone knows that people commit suicide because of temporary insanity." I was really annoyed at his obtuseness, but I maintained my temper. "Come, Stephen, you accused me the other day of having a blind spot. It's you who have one."

Dr. Low gave me a long, odd look as though I were a complete stranger to him. For a moment I positively thought that the excitement had unbalanced his mind. Then he became reasonable again. "You're quite right, Sarah. I do have a blind spot. I've had one for nearly fifty years."

I knew of course that he was referring to his devotion to me — a pun on love being blind, you know. It was a relief to see him his old humorous self again. I told him so and then I held out my arm. "It's after four o'clock, Stephen," I reminded him. And added in a joking tone, "You mustn't forget to give me my distilled water."

He gave me another of those strange looks. Evidently he hadn't got the joke. "What did you say, Sarah?"

"My distilled water," I repeated. "You know, my injection."

My effort at lightness failed. He relapsed into his peculiar mood. He walked heavily to the window and stood there staring out for a moment. He passed his hand over his hair. Then he turned and said, "All right, Sarah," and went into the bathroom to prepare the hypodermic.

When he came out he was pale and trembling. "For heaven's sake, Stephen," I said, out of patience at last, "you're behaving like Grosvenor!"

"We have a great deal in common, Grosvenor and I," he said. He poised the needle over my arm, then stopped.

"Can't you find the vein?" I inquired.

He disregarded my question. "Sarah, do you really intend to go through with disinheriting Grosvenor?" he asked.

"That depends entirely on him," I said. "So long as he behaves, I shall postpone the making of a new will. I shall tell him so tomorrow. It should prove a spur to future good conduct."

"I see," said Dr. Low. He found the vein and inserted the needle.

He left immediately afterward. He did not recover his good spirits. Poor man, he's so devoted to me that he's as disturbed by my troubles as though they were his own to bear.

I'm really very tired — the effect of nerve stress, of course, and then I've been writing for nearly two hours. It's such a comfort to have you as a confidante, Louisa. I feel that you more than anyone else completely understands me. This is rather strange because — well, I'm going to let you in on a little secret, Louisa. At one time I actually believed that you were the woman with whom Harley was having an *affaire*. Seems ridiculous that I should have thought that, doesn't it?

I shall really have to stop. I'm so weary that my hand is trembling and I've commenced to feel an obstruction in my chest. If I didn't have so much confidence in Stephen Low, I should be worried about the possibility of another attack. I think I'll just lock my door so that when Grosvenor comes home I won't be subjected to discussion or argument.

It must be nearly six o'clock. In a little while the Trent woman will be gone and Grosvenor will be free of her forever. Yes, there's the whirring sound that Father's clock always makes a minute before it strikes. Harley used to call it Time holding its breath, waiting for something to happen. It's getting quite dark and everything is very still. I wonder if it's going to storm. There's the hour striking now. I've never been so tired. I shall sleep soundly tonight.

Your friend,

SARAH GROSVENOR BEACH

ANNOUNCEMENT: *With the help of Cornell Woolrich himself and the unselfish assistance of aficionados the length and breadth of these United States, we have just completed building a remarkable inventory of Woolrich-Irish stories — no less than thirteen (lucky number!) — and not a single one of them has ever been reprinted before or previously published in any book (including anthologies). For years we have been digging in old (and forgotten) magazines, especially in those private-eye periodicals which are no longer readily available even from the dusty stocks of second-hand specialists. These magazines take long hunting and longer patience to find, and even when found yield only a small percentage of high-assay nuggets. But those nuggets are worth the time, the effort, and the eye-strain. Indeed, the thirteen Woolrich stories are literally hand-picked. They include such fine, but unknown, Woolrichiana as "The Humming Bird Comes Home," "Cinderella and the Mob," and "Charlie Won't Be Home Tonight." We plan to bring you these "finds" quite regularly from now on, beginning in this issue with a typically Woolrichian thriller, "Johnny on the Spot."*

# JOHNNY ON THE SPOT

*by CORNELL WOOLRICH*

THE CLOCK on the wall of the cafeteria said quarter to four in the morning when he came in from the street. He wasn't even twenty-eight yet, Johnny Donovan. Any doctor in town would have given him fifty more years. Only he himself knew better than that. He didn't even have fifty days left; maybe only fifty hours, or maybe fifty minutes, depending on how good he was.

There hadn't been anyone in sight on the street when he came in just now, he'd made sure of that, and this place was half the island away from where anyone would expect to find him; that was why he'd started coming here for his food the past few nights. And that was why he'd told Jean to meet him here tonight, after her last show at the club, if she couldn't hold out any more; if she had to see him so bad. Poor kid, he sure felt sorry for her! Married at seventeen, and a widow at eighteen — any minute now. There was one thing he was glad of, that he'd managed to keep her out of it. She knew about it, of course, but they didn't know about her; didn't even know she existed. And dancing twice nightly right at one of Beefy Borden's own clubs, the prettiest girl on the floor! Taking fifty every Saturday from Beefy's

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"front" down there, while Beefy had guys out looking for him all over town, and would have given ten times that much just to connect with him! It made him laugh every time he thought of it — almost, not quite.

But it wasn't so surprising at that. Beefy was one of those rare, domesticated big-shots who, outside of killing-hours, thought there was no one like that silver-blond wife and those two daughters of his. Johnny, when he used to drop in their Ocean Avenue apartment on business in the old prohibition days, plenty of times found him there helping his kids with their homework or playing with them on the floor, maybe a couple of hours after he'd had some poor devil buried alive in quicklime out in the wilds of Jamaica or dumped overboard from one of his runners with a pail of cement for shoes. That being the case, even a lovely number like Jean couldn't be expected to make a dent in him, often as he must have seen her trucking around on the hardwood down at the Wicked Nineties. Otherwise he would have asked questions, tried to find out something about her. But to him she was just a Jean Marvel — her own idea of a stage-tag at sixteen — just a name on one of the dozen payrolls he checked once a month with his various fronts. Not even that. She just wasn't. She was: "No. 9 — @ 50 = $200." She'd told Johnny that she'd said "Good evening" to Beefy one night leaving the club — after all, he was her bread-and-butter — and he'd turned around and asked someone, "Who the hell wazzat?"

He was sick of dodging them; had a bellyful of trying to save his precious hide. He had it up to his neck, this business of sleeping all day in movie houses and bolting meals at four in the morning and keeping just one jump ahead of them the whole time. The way he felt tonight he almost wished they'd catch up with him and get it over with! What was so awful about choking yourself to death in a gunny-sack anyway? You couldn't do it more than once.

But there was Jean. Outside of wanting him straight, which had started the whole mess, she also wanted him alive — for some wacky reason or other. He could hear her now, like she had been the last time they'd stolen a brief get-together riding hidden on the back platform of the Shuttle. That was last Sunday. She had laced it into him, eyes flinty, voice husky with scorn:

"Yellow. No, not even yellow, orange! A quitter. And that's what I married! Ready to take it on the chin, aren't you?" And then pointing to her own lovely dimpled one: "Well, this is your chin!" And pounding herself furiously: "And this is the chest that gets the bullets when you stand up to 'em! Don't I count? No, I get left behind — without my music, without my rhythm, without my guy, for all you care! Not while I know it! Who is this Beefy Borden — God?" Then suddenly nearly breaking in two: "See it through for me, Johnny. Stay

alive. Don't welsh on me now. Just a few days longer! The dough will come through by the end of this week — then we can both lam out of this hell-hole together!" And after the train had carried her back to the Times Square end and he'd lost himself in the Grand Central crowd, hat down over his mouth, he could still hear it ringing in his ears: "Stay alive for me, Johnny. Stay alive!" Well, he'd done his best, but it couldn't keep up forever.

There was a taxi driver dozing in the back of the place. He was the only other one in there. Have to quit coming here after tonight; he'd been here three nights in a row now; time to change to another place. He loosened the knot of his necktie and undid the top button of his shirt. Hadn't changed it in ten days and it was fixing to walk off his back of its own accord.

He picked up a greasy aluminum tray and slid it along the triple rails that banked the counter. He hooked a bowl of shredded wheat, a dwarf pitcher of milk, and some other junk as he went along. When he got to the end where the counterman was, he said, "Two, sunnyside up." He hadn't eaten since four the night before. He'd just gotten through collecting a meal in a place on Sixth Avenue around two when he'd spotted someone over in a corner that looked familiar from the back. He had had to get up and blow — couldn't risk it.

The counterman yapped through a hole in the wall behind him, "Two — on their backs!" and something began spitting. Johnny picked a table all the way in the rear and sat down with his back to the street. He couldn't see who was coming in that way, without turning, but it made him harder to recognize from outside through the plate-glass front. He turned his collar up in back to hide the shape of his neck.

He took out a much-folded newspaper, fished for a pencil, and while crunching shredded wheat began to fill in the blank squares of a crossword puzzle. He could do that and mean it! You go arm-in-arm with death for ten days or a couple of weeks, and it loses most of its sting. Even the answer to what is "a sap-giving tree" can be more interesting for the time being — help you forget.

He didn't see the maroon car that drew up outside, and he didn't hear it. It came up very soft, coasting to a stop. He didn't see the two well-dressed individuals that got out of it without cracking the door behind them, edged up closer to the lighted window-front and peered in. They exchanged a triumphant look that might have meant, "We'll eat in here, this is our dish."

He was half-dozing over his puzzle by this time, splinters of shredded wheat clinging to his lips. On the other hand, the somnolent taxi driver, peculiarly enough, suddenly came wide awake and seemed to remember something that required his presence in the washroom. He slipped in there

very deftly without making a sound; got as far away from the door as possible, and then just stood around like he was waiting for something to be over. He passed the time away counting over a fairly solid wad of fins and sawbucks. Then he met his own eyes in the mirror and he quickly turned his head away, like he wasn't glad to meet himself, for once.

The two came in, and they weren't in a hurry, and they weren't trying to sneak up on the quarry now any more. They didn't have to, they had him. One of them, who went in for artistic flourishes, even hung back a step behind the other and deliberately yanked two bright-green pasteboards from the box near the door, which made a dyspeptic bell sing out a couple of times; as if to show how law-abiding, how house-broken, he and his friend could be when they came in a public place. It was like a rattlesnake warning before it strikes. It couldn't have made any difference anyway; they each had a right hand stuck deep into their coat pockets, and both pockets were sort of stiff and weighted down.

The bell woke Johnny without registering; by the time his eyes opened, he'd forgotten what did it. Then he saw them sitting at the table with him, one opposite and one right next to him, shoulder to shoulder, so close the loaded pocket dug into his hip. The one across the china table top had his pocket up too, just sort of resting on the lip of the table, pointing Johnny's way. The counterman was busy transferring pats of butter to little paper rosettes; it wouldn't have mattered even if he hadn't been.

Johnny looked from one face to the other, and his own whitened a little. Just for a second, then the color came right back; he'd been expecting this for too long to stay scared.

They looked like three brothers, or three pals, sitting there huddled over the table together, intimate, familiar.

"Put it on the table in front of you," suggested the one next to Johnny. "Keep the newspaper over it."

Johnny reached under his left arm and took out something. If his coat hadn't been buttoned, he could have turned it around and fired through the cloth. He would have gone, but he could have taken one of them with him. But there wasn't room enough to turn it under his coat, it faced outward where there was nothing but a glass caseful of desserts to get at. He slid it under the newspaper and the one opposite him hauled it out on the other side and it disappeared into his clothing without the light once getting at it.

When this tricky feat had been accomplished satisfactorily, the first one said, "We wanna see you, Donovan."

"Take a good look," Johnny said in a low voice. "How does a guy that's gone straight appeal to you?"

"Dead," answered the party across the table.

"I've got something you can't kill," Johnny said. His eyes lit up like radio

dials and all of a sudden he was proud of himself for the first time since he was in long pants. "I'm straight now. I'm on the level. Not all the bullets in all the gats in all New York can take that away from me."

"They can make you smell a lot different in twenty-four hours," the one next to him said. And the one across the way put in: "He thinks he's gonna get bullets, no less! Wake up, pogie, this ain't 1919. You'll beg for bullets. You'll get down on your knees and pray for 'em before we get through with you!"

Johnny smiled and said, "When the State turns on the heat, they give a guy a last meal; let him order his head off. This being my last meal, let's see if you're big enough to lemme finish what I ordered." He took up his spoon in his left hand.

"We got all night," one assured him. "We'll even pay your check for you. Sing Sing has nothing on us."

The other one looked at the shredded wheat and laughed. "That's a hell of a thing to croak with in your guts!"

"They're my guts," observed Johnny, chewing away, "and it's my party." He took up the pencil in his right hand and went ahead with the puzzle. "What's a five-letter word for the goddess of love?" he asked nonchalantly.

They exchanged a dubious look, not in reference to the goddess of love however. "Can't you see he's stalling you?" one growled. "How do we know what this place is? Let's go."

The ticket bell at the door rang and a very pretty girl came in alone. Her face turned very white under the lights, like she'd been up all night. But she wasn't logy at all. She seemed to know just what she was doing. She glanced over her shoulder just once, at the maroon car outside the door, but did not look at the three men at the table at all. Then she picked up a cup of coffee from the counterman and brushed straight by them without a look, sat down facing them one table further back, and, like any respectable girl that hour of the night, kept her long lashes down over her eyes while she stirred and stirred the java with a tin spoon.

Johnny looked at her and seemed to get an inspiration. "Venus," he said suddenly, "that's the word! Why didn't I think of it?" But instead of "Venus" he scribbled on the margin of the diagram: "Stay back — I'm covered. Goodbye."

The others had been taking a short, admiring gander at her too. "Momma!" said one of them. "Is that easy to take!"

"Yeah," agreed the other. "Too bad we're on business. Y'never see 'em like that when you're on y'own time!"

"What's a three-letter word —" Johnny began again. Then suddenly losing his temper, he exclaimed: "Jeeze! I can't do this damn thing!" He tore the puzzle out of the paper, crumpled it irritably into a ball, and tossed it away from him — toward the next table.

The girl sitting at it dropped her paper napkin at that minute, then stooped to pick it up again.

The three men got up from the table together and started toward the front of the place. They walked fairly slowly, Johnny in the middle, one on each side. Their three bodies were ganged at the hips, where the coat pockets were. The one on the inside, although he hadn't eaten anything, helped himself to a toothpick from the counter from force of habit and began prodding away with one hand. The washroom door opened on a crack, a nose showed, and then it prudently closed again. The girl at the table was very white and kept stirring her coffee without tasting it, as if she didn't know what her wrist was doing at all.

The counterman just then was further down the line, hauling a platter of fried eggs through the hole in the wall. It was exactly ten minutes since Johnny Donovan had first come in, five to four in the morning. The short-order cook must have had to heat up the frying pan first.

"Two bright-side up!" bawled the counterman. Then he looked at the table and saw that they weren't there any more. They were all the way up by the cash register. He came up after them, behind the counter, carrying the eggs. "Hey!" he said. "Don't you want your eggs?"

"Naw, he's lost his appetite," one of them said. "Get in the car with him," he murmured to his companion. "I'll pay his check."

He let electric light in between himself and Johnny, fished out some change, and tossed down the three checks, two blank and one punched. Johnny and the other fellow went out the door, still shoulder to shoulder, drifted across the sidewalk, and got into the back of the maroon car. The door slapped smartly and the curtains dropped down behind the windows.

The counterman didn't like people who just came into his place to warm chairs and then walked out again on blank checks. He made the mistake of charging for the eggs which hadn't been eaten. The girl in the back had gotten up now and was moving with a sort of lazy walk toward the man who had stayed behind. She'd tacked on a bright-red new mouth with her lipstick and suddenly didn't seem so respectable any more.

"So I'm paying for the eggs, am I?" barked the man at the counter. "Okay, hand 'em over." He pulled the plate away from the counterman, tilted it upward on his palm, fitted it viciously across the other's face, and ground it in with a sort of half turn. Egg yolk dripped down in yellow chains, "Have 'em on me, you mosey sap!" he magnanimously offered.

The girl gave a shrill, brazen laugh of approval that sounded like her voice was cracked. "Gee, sweetheart," she said, "I could go for a guy like you. How does it look for a little lift in your car? I been stemming all night and my dogs are yapping." She deliberately separated a nickel of his change and skimmed it back across the

glass to pay for her coffee, then nudged him chummily with her elbow. "You and me and a flock of etchings, how about it?" she invited.

"Some other time, momma," he said tersely. "Got no time tonight." He pocketed the rest of his change and stalked out. The counterman was shaking French fried potatoes out of his collar, but he knew enough not to say anything out loud.

The girl went out after the fellow who had just turned her down, like some sort of a magnet was pulling her toward the car.

He'd already gotten in at the wheel when she got over to it. "C'mon, whaddya say?" she pleaded hoarsely. "Don't be selfish. Just a couple blocks lift would be a life saver." She put one foot up on the running board, put one hand to the latch of the door. Her face was all damp and pasty-looking, but it took more than that amount of dishevelment to fog its beauty.

The one at the wheel hesitated, with the motor already turning over. He looked over his shoulder into the darkness questioningly, even longingly. Evidently she'd gotten under his skin. "How about it?" he said to the other one. "Drop her off at your place and then come back for her when we're through?" He wanted the answer to be yes awfully bad.

She had the door open by now. One more move and she would have been on the front seat next to him. The answer did not come from the one he'd put it up to at all. It came from their "guest." It was Johnny Donovan's voice that answered, that put the crusher on it, strangely enough. A word of warning, a single cry for help from him, and they would have been compelled to take her too, in self-defense, because she would have caught onto what they were doing. He knew enough not to do that. Instead, he said almost savagely: "Kick her out — or is this part of what I get too?"

There was a vicious slap from the rear of the car, but the remark snapped the driver out of it, showed him what a fool thing he'd been about to do. That twist had magnetism or something. He gave her a terrific shove at the throat that sent her skittering backwards off the running board and very nearly flat on her back, grunting: "Where's ya manners? Don't crowd like that!" And a minute later the car was just a red tail light a block down, and then it wasn't even that.

She was still lurching from the push he'd given her. She said, "Johnny, oh my God, Johnny, you've killed yourself!" But she said it very low, so low that the taxi driver who had come out just then and was standing beside her looking in the same direction she was, didn't even hear her.

They weren't going to kill him — it was he who had killed himself! Didn't he know she could have saved him? Didn't he know she'd brought a little gun of her own in her handbag to this last meeting of theirs? Didn't he know all she needed was to get into that car with them, and wait for a

favorable opportunity, and she could have pulled the trick? She saw where she had made her mistake now; she should have used it right in the cafeteria while she still had the chance. But in there there'd been two of them covering him, in the car only one while the other was at the wheel. That was why she'd waited, used her eyes on them for all she was worth, been within an ace of getting away with it — and then at the last minute he himself had to snatch the chance away from her, cut himself off from help.

She knew why he'd done it, and she cursed that habit in men of sparing their women. Didn't they know women? Didn't they know there was nothing on God's earth could be so terrible, so remorseless, as a woman when the one she loved was in danger? The toughest triggerman was a Salvation Army lassie compared to a woman at such a time.

"They're not going to have him!" Jean Donovan whispered into the night that surrounded her, eyes hard as mica and so big they seemed to cover her whole face. "They're not — going — to — take — him away from me!" One look at her expression and the taxi driver, who had been considering taking up acquaintanceship where the other two had left off, changed his mind and slunk away. You don't try to make dates with a tiger.

He took a deep belly breath of relief as he saw the guy in front push her off the car and nearly on her ear. "Thank God," he said to himself, "she stays out of it!" They hadn't, evidently, either one of them recognized her from the Club; Beefy had two or three, and the Long Island City one was where they did most of their hanging out when they did any. It had been chiefly a Long Island outfit from the beginning. But one peep from her just now, one "Johnny!" and she would have been sunk. He'd been scared stiff that she'd give herself away. It was okay now though. She'd look pretty in black, poor little monkey. She looked pretty in anything. He turned his head around and looked back at her through the diamond-shaped rear pane as they zoomed off, then covered himself by grating, "Damned little bum, trying to horn in! I like to die private."

The one next to him gave him another slap, backhand across the eyes, and they filled with water. "You're gonna," he promised.

They followed St. Nick to 168th, cut west, and connected with Riverside. "Y'got pretty far uptown for a Brooklyn fella," the one at the wheel mentioned, "but not far enough."

"Is Ratsy gonna be burned!" laughed his mate. "The Big Boy sends him all the way to Buffalo on a phony tip day before yesterday. And Ratsy hates Buffalo, he went to Reform School there! And while he's gone we snag the son right here!"

There wasn't a car in sight on the Drive at that hour; the lights of the bridge were like a string of pearls

hanging up in the air behind them. They turned south, slowed, and drew up almost at once. "As quick as all that?" thought Johnny, thankfully. "Then I'm not going to get the trimmings! There wouldn't be time, out in the open like this."

The one in front cut the dashboard lights, said: "Hurry it up now! We don't wanna be hanging around here too long —"

"We shoulda brought that dame after all," the other one said. "She coulda fronted for us." He took his gun out, turned it, swung back, and brought the butt down on the side of Johnny's head with a pounding crash. Johnny groaned but didn't go right out, so he smashed him again with it, this time on the other side, then went on: "That gal coulda made it look like a necking party, while we're standing still here like this."

"Get busy, and we don't need to be standing still!" was the answer. "Got the blanket? Fix it so it looks like he's soused."

The one in back took out copper wire from the side pocket, caught the limp figure's wrists behind him, coiled it cruelly around them. The skin broke instantly and the strands of the wire disappeared under it. Then he did it to his ankles too. Then he propped him up in the corner, took the lap robe and tucked it around him up to his neck. He took out a bottle of whisky, palmed a handful, sloshed it across Johnny's face, sprinkled the blanket with it. "Let's go," he muttered. "He smells like a still. He oughta be good for a hundred fifty traffic lights now!"

The lights went up, the driver kicked his foot down, and they arched away like a plane taking off. "It musta been great," he lamented mournfully, "in the old days before they had traffic lights!"

"They had no organization in them days," said his companion scornfully. "They went to jail like flies — even for cracking safes, mind ya! Take it slower, we're getting downtown."

Johnny came to between two red-hot branding irons just as they swerved out onto the express highway at Seventy-fourth. The outside of his mouth was free, but a strip of tape fastened to his upper gums clamped his tongue to the roof of his mouth. The only sounds he could make sounded like the mumblings of a drunk. He saw the black outline of the Jersey shore skimming by across the river.

They took Canal Street across, then followed the Bowery, which still showed signs of life; he knew it by the El pillars shuffling past. Then the wire lacework of one of the bridges, Brooklyn probably. A tug bleated dismally way under them. There hadn't been, strictly speaking, any traffic lights all the way down; they'd all gone out hours ago. It was the street lights flickering in and out of the car they were on guard against. They had to slow up once, in downtown Brooklyn, for a street accident, and there must have been a cop near. They both got very talkative and

solicitous all at once. "Head still going round and round, Johnny?" the one in front asked. "Never mind, you'll be home in bed in no time now."

"What he needs," said the one in back, gun out under cover of the blanket, but not pointing at Johnny this time, "is a good strong cup o' black coffee."

"Looks like your friend can't hold his liquor," said a third voice, outside the car, and a face peered jocularly in at him, under a visor.

"Ing, ing, ing," Johnny panted, sweat coursing down his face. He reared desperately toward the silhouette.

The face pulled back again. "Ouch, what a breath! I could get lit meself on that alone."

"I told him not to mix his drinks." They swerved out, then in again, sloshed through some water, sped on. The one next to him caught him by both cheeks with one hand, dragged them together, heaved his head back into the corner of the seat. His lower lip opened and blood came out. "That cop," he observed calmly, "don't know how lucky he is he didn't get what you were trying to tell him!"

"Did he lamp the plates?" he asked the driver.

"I turned 'em over just as we came up." He did something to the dashboard and there was a slapping sound from the rear fender.

The lights got fewer, then after awhile there weren't any more; they were out in the wilds of Jamaica now, Beefy's happy hunting ground. A big concrete building that looked like a warehouse or refrigerating plant showed up. "Well, anyway," one of them said to Johnny, "we gave you your money's worth; it wasn't one of those short hauls!" When he looked closer he saw that Johnny was out again; he'd been lying on his mangled wrists at an acute angle ever since they'd left the place where they met the cop.

They drove into the building, car and all, and got him out between them, and a new guy took the wheel of the car and an elevator took it down below some place out of sight. Yet this wasn't a garage. When Johnny Donovan regained consciousness for the second time that night, it was with the help of a fistful of shaved ice being held between his eyes. He was up in the loft of this building, a big barn of a place, half of it lost in shadows that the row of coned lights overhead couldn't reach; it was cold as a tomb, sawdust on the floor, and a row of porcelain refrigerator doors facing him gleamed clinically white, dazzled the eyes.

Beefy Borden was there, with a white turtle-neck sweater under his coat jacket, perched on a tall three-legged stool, gargoyle-like. The two that had brought Johnny had turned their coat collars up against the cold, but him they promptly stripped to the waist as soon as he had opened his eyes. The skin on his stomach and back crawled involuntarily, half dead as he was, and contracted into goose

pimples. They had left him upright for a moment, and his knees immediately caved under him, hit the sawdust. He held his spine straight by sheer will power and stayed that way; wouldn't go down any further.

Beefy lit a cigarette, handed his two henchmen one, studied Johnny interestedly, seemingly without hatred. "So that's how they look when they go straight," he murmured. "Why, I thought I'd see something — pair of wings at least, or one of these here now hellos shining on top of his conk. I don't notice anything, do you, boys? I wouldn't gotten up at this hour and come all the way out here if I'da known." All very playful and coy, with a wink for each one.

One of them jerked his head back by the hair, pried his mouth open, and tore out the tape. A little blood followed, from the lining of the cheeks. They took away the copper wire from his wrists next.

Beefy flicked ashes from his cigarette, drawled: "Well, I'll tell you, I think he's had enough, don't you? We just set out to frighten him a little, didn't we, boys? I think he's learned his lesson. Whaddya say we let him have his clothes back and send him home?" He gave them each a long, meaning look so they got the idea. "Only first, of course, he's gotta show the right spirit, ask for it in the proper way, say he's sorry and all like that. Now suppose you crawl over here, right in front of me, and just ask, beg real hard — that's all y'gotta do, and then we'll call it quits."

Johnny saw his foot twitch; knew it was loaded with a kick for his face when and if he did. It wasn't the obvious phoniness of the offer that held him back, even if it had been genuine, even if it had been as easy as all that to get out of it — he still wouldn't have done it. Life wasn't that precious. Man has a soul — even a kid from nowhere whom nobody would miss, trapped in a refrigerating plant.

He writhed to his shackled feet and hobbled a little way toward Beefy. One of them was holding his coat and shirt up for bait, but Johnny didn't even glance that way. He stared into the pig-eyes of the Big Shot. Then suddenly, without a word, he spat blood and saliva full into his face. "That's the cleanest thing ever touched you," he said hoarsely. "Gimme death, so I won't have to keep on seeing and smelling you! Those are my last words. Now try to get another sound out of me!"

They knocked him down flat on his back, and he just lay there looking at the ceiling. Beefy got down from the stool very slowly, face twitching all over and luminous with rage. He wiped the back of his hand across one cheek, motioned with the other. "Hand me that belt of his." They put it in his hand. He paid it around, caught it at the opposite end from the thin, flat silver buckle. "Go down below and bring up a sack of salt on the elevator with you." His eyes never left Johnny's face. He addressed the remaining one: "Put your foot on his neck and hold him down.

When I tell you to, you can turn him over on the other side." Then he spoke directly to Johnny: "Now listen while you're still able to, listen what's coming to you. You're gonna be beaten raw with your own belt. The salt — that's so you'll know it. That'll keep the blood in too, so you'll last awhile, an hour or two anyway. Stinging and smarting to death."

Johnny didn't answer. Beefy stripped off his coat, swung the buckled strap back in a long hissing arc, brought it over and down again with the velocity of a bullet. His assistant steadied his foot against the spasm that coursed through what he was holding down. There wasn't a human sound in the place from then on.

It wouldn't be listed in the phone book, of course, so she didn't even bother looking it up. Every second counted. The wheels of that death car were racing around like mad under him this very minute, and here she was stuck way up here on the edge of creation, miles from anywhere. But that bloated swine that was behind all this, he had a home somewhere, he lived somewhere in this town, there was somewhere she could reach him. Oh, it was too late by now to beg or plead for Johnny's life — the ride had started already — and even if it hadn't been, she knew how much good it would have done her, but at least she could put a bullet through him!

The police? Weren't they those men in blue that directed traffic at crossings? They'd find Johnny's body eventually — that was about where they fitted in. And even then — that Druckman case awhile back, for instance. There was only one man who could stop what was going to happen in time, and that was the man who had started it. Thank God, she knew that much at least; knew which direction the blow had come from. She had wangled the whole set-up out of Johnny weeks ago.

She darted out into the roadway, where anything on wheels would have to stop for her, and began to run crazily along. A pair of heads twinkled across from left to right at the next intersection, half a block down, and she screamed at them, brought them around in a half circle to a stop. It was a private machine with a "girl scout" in it. "Wanna lift?"

She came up panting. "Fifty-eighth Street — oh, for the love of God, get me down there!"

"Whoa! That's not the right spirit. Y'wanna look at this thing a little more sociably. I'm not in the hacking business —" But she'd fled onward already.

She got her cab a minute later, it had turned in toward her. "The Wicked Nineties," she strangled. "No, never mind your meter. I'll give you twenty dollars flat, twenty-five, anything, only get me there. Cut loose!" She took out the hard-earned money that was to have gotten them to Miami, shook it at him. "It's a matter of life and death, d'you understand?"

She took out the gun, fixed it, while they lurched down the endless lengths of St. Nicholas Avenue. Bannerman, her boss, Beefy's "front" down there — he'd know; he'd be able to tell her where to reach him, if she had to shoot him to get it out of him.

"Good boy!" she breathed fervently as he tore into the park at 110th instead of taking Fifth. Fifth was straight and the park had curves, but he knew what he was doing; you could make any speed you wanted to in there at this dawn hour. When they came out at Fifty-ninth, the street lights had just gone out all over town. Two two-wheeled skids more and they were in front of where she worked, not a light showing outside of it any more.

"Here's thirty," she said, vaulting out. "Now stay there, wait — you've got to take me some place else yet! You'll get all the rest of this, if you'll only wait!"

She ran down the long carpeted foyer, past her own picture on the walls, burst into the room beyond like an avenging angel. The last customer was out, the lights low, the tables stacked, the scrubwomen down on their knees. If he'd gone already, Bannerman, if she'd missed him! His office door flew open at her push, so he was still around somewhere. He wasn't in there; she could hear him washing his hands in his little private cubbyhole beyond. He heard her, but she beat him to the lavatory door, locked him in from the outside.

"Hey, you!" He began to pound.

She went through the desk like a cyclone, dropping papers and whole drawers around her. She couldn't find it; it wasn't left lying around like that. Then she saw he'd hung his coat up on a hook before he went in; it was in a little private memorandum book in the inside pocket of that. Both of them, the home address and the telephone number. Just the initials, B. B. But that was it. Way over in Brooklyn somewhere.

She grabbed up the hand-set and began to hack away at it. Dead. More grief, the club operator had gone home long ago. She picked up Bannerman's bunch of keys, found the one to the office door, slipped out, and locked that up after her too. A minute later she heard a crash as he busted down the lavatory partition. She was already around at the main switchboard off the foyer, plugging in her call herself. Not for nothing had she once done a stretch of that.

No answer — but then it was a 5 A.M. call. "Keep it up, operator, keep it up!" She turned her head and yelled at one of the terrified scrubwomen: "Keep away from that door, you! He's drunk as an owl in there!"

Suddenly there was a woman's voice in her ears, sleepy, frightened too. "Hello, who — who do you want?"

"Lemme talk to Borden. Borden, quick! Got an important message for him!"

"He's not here —"

"Well, where can I reach him!

Hurry, I tell you, I'm not kidding!"

"He didn't say where he was going — he never does — he —"

"Who is this? Speak up, can't you, you fool! No one's gonna bite you!"

"This is his wife. Who are you? How'd you know where he lives? No one ever rings him here —"

"I'm the girl with the dreamy eyes! And I'm coming over there and give the message myself!"

The driver was still turning the three tens over and over when she landed in back of him. "Ocean Avenue — and just as fast as ever!"

Bannerman got to the club entrance all mussed-looking just as they went into high. Breaking down two doors in succession had spoiled the part in his hair.

It was a skyscraper apartment house on Brooklyn's Fifth Avenue, the number that had been in Bannerman's memo book, and naturally he'd have the roof — she didn't need the night operator to tell her that. She gave the hackman another thirty. "Now wait some more. I know you think I'm crazy, but — but maybe you once loved someone too!"

"It ain't my business," he said agreeably, and began thumbing his sixty lovingly.

She wasn't coming back this time, at least she didn't think so then, but it wouldn't hurt to have him handy. "Certainly I'm expected," she told the hallman. He didn't like the hour, but he'd already made a half-turn toward the second of two elevators. "Well, just a minute until I find out." He went over to the house phone.

It was Beefy's private lift, no doors in the shaft up to the penthouse, and it was automatic; by keeping her thumb pressed to the starter he couldn't reverse it and get her down again. He'd bring cops in right away; they were probably eating out of Beefy's hand for miles around here, too.

The elevator slide let her right out into the apartment, and the hallman was already buzzing like mad from below to warn them. Borden's young wife was heading for the instrument from the room beyond, in pattering bare feet, as Jean got there. She'd thrown a mink coat over a nightgown. She stopped dead for a minute, then went right on again under pressure.

"Don't make me do something I don't want to," Jean said softly. "Just say it's all right; that you were expecting me. Well, go on, say it!" She motioned with the little gun.

" 'Sallright, was expecting her," the woman slobbered into the house phone. Jean clicked it off for her.

"Now, where is he?"

"Uh-uh-uh," the Borden woman sputtered, stalling for time.

"Come on! Can't you tell by my face not to fool around with me?"

She didn't know. He'd been gone since about ten that evening. He never told her anything about his business.

"Business — ha!" There was more to be leery of in her laugh than there

had been in her anger. "He's got my man in a spot — right now, this very minute — and I'm going to pay him back in his own coin! Either you help me head him off in time or you get it yourself!"

"He doesn't do things like that, not my Beefy. You've got him wrong. They've given you a bum steer. Now wait a minute, honey; don't lose your nice ways! Honest, if I knew where he was I'd tell you. One of his club managers, Bannerman, he might know." Her loosened hair fell down over her face.

"That's what I'm thinking too," Jean said curtly. "I just came from Bannerman, but I didn't have any — inducement — then, to get him to tell me. We'll try our luck now — but not from here. Come on. You're coming with me — back to my own place! Pick up that house phone! What's the guy's name down there? Jerry? Say, Jerry, will you come up here a minute? Take the public elevator."

The gun raised her to her feet like a lever. "Jerry, will you come up here a minute? Take the public elevator." Then she said craftily, "Yes."

Jean's hand sealed the orifice like a flash. "He asked you if there was anything wrong, didn't he?" She raised the gun. "Make it, Yes, we think we see a man outside on the terrace." She tore her away from it. "Now, come on!" She began pulling her after her to the waiting private elevator.

"My feet are bare!" the captive wailed.

There was a pair of galoshes standing near the elevator. Jean scuffed them into the car. "Stick 'em in those going down!" Further back, in a recess, a red-glass knob had lighted up warningly.

They started down. Again Jean kept the ball of her thumb on the button. He couldn't cut them off from above. The lobby was deserted. She pulled Mrs. Borden, in nightgown, galoshes, and mink coat, into the cab after her. "Manhattan!" she clipped at the avaricious driver. "And this time you're really going to get dough!"

It was getting lighter by the minute now, but was still too early for anything to be open. She stopped him at an all-night drug store down near Borough Hall, hauled her furred freight in after her. "This woman's real sick," she threw at the sleepy clerk, and the two of them crushed into one phone booth, Mrs. Borden on the inside.

She didn't know where to reach Bannerman at his home, any more than her prisoner did (and she believed her), but she was praying he'd stayed on at the Nineties on account of those two smashed doors and to see if she'd lifted anything from his office. She rang the club. He answered himself.

"Now listen, and listen carefully! Get Beefy Borden on the wire from where you are — I don't care where he is, but get him — and keep the line open, waiting! I'm going to call you again in ten minutes, from some

place else. You better have him when I do! And he better have Johnny Donovan still alive for me!"

"I don't know whatcha talking about," he tried to say. "Who's Johnny Donovan? And for that matter, who's Beefy Borden?"

"He's thinks I'm ribbing!" she raged at Mrs. Borden. "Tell him about it yourself!"

"Dave, for God's sake, do what she says!" the haggard blonde croaked into the transmitter. "It's June, can't you hear me? June! She's taken me off with her in a cab and she's got a gun on me!"

Jean pushed her aside. "Do you know who that was or don't you? Ten minutes," she warned him, and hung up. They went hustling out again, Jean's right fist buried deep in the rich mink, and got back into the cab again.

They lived on Fifty-eighth, she and Johnny; at least he had until two weeks ago. All his things were still up there, and it had broken her heart nightly for fourteen nights now just to look at them. Just one-room-and, but in a fairly slick place, the Parc Concorde.

She brought out all the rest of the Miami money, spread it out fanwise in her hand, offered it to the driver. "Help yourself — and forget all about what you've seen tonight!" Mrs. Borden was too near prostration by now to budge, even without a gun on her.

"One from each end and one from the middle," he gloated, picking them out, "and I get a radio put in."

She crammed the rest of it back into her bag. There was still more than enough left to get them *to* Miami — the thing was, would she get the chance to use it?

Too late, in the elevator, June Borden came to. "Don't let her take me in there! She's — I dunno what she's gonna do!"

"All this row just because I bring you home to put you under a cold shower! You *will* mix your drinks!" She slipped a ten into the hallman's hand.

He grinned reassuringly. "You'll be all right in the morning, lady." He gave Jean the office. "Mrs. Donovan would not think of hurting ya, wouldja, Mrs. Donovan? You just do what she tells ya!"

Jean closed the door after them and locked it. "Sit down in that chair and let's find out if you live or die."

She got the Wicked Nineties back, calmly stripping off her hat and coat while she waited. She opened her bag with one hand and took the gun out.

Bannerman had a voice waiting for her on another wire, but they couldn't connect the two lines. She hadn't thought of that in time. So near and yet so far! "Plug me through the club switchboard!" she rasped.

"I don't know how, I never worked it!" He tried it and she found herself talking to a produce market up in the Bronx. She got him back again, her heart turning inside out. "Is he alive — only tell me that, is he alive?"

"I can't swing it while both lines stay open. Gimme your number, then

hang up a minute, let them call you —"

Mrs. Borden came over, starting to cry. "Dave, Dave, do what she says! You gotta get Beefy, I tell you!"

"Listen," Jean said. "Pull out his plug on your callboard, got that? Then cut mine into the socket you got his out of — that's all you've got to do!"

There was a click, and then another voice came on. It was Borden's. She knew it just by that one "Who the hell wazzat?" he'd thrown after her in the club alley one night. It echoed hollowly, as though he was in some sort of a big hall or arena. "All right, twist. What's all this jalappy you're handing out?"

"You've got Johnny Donovan there with you. I've got June Borden here with me. Do we swap, or don't we?"

"Trying to do, throw a scare into me? You'll wish you'd never been born when I get through with —"

"I know you're checking this number like blazes while you're trying to string me along. Listen, you could be right at the door now and you wouldn't be in time to save her. Matter, don't you believe I've got her here? Don't you believe Bannerman? All right, help yourself." She motioned her prisoner over. "Sell yourself!"

"Max! Max!" his wife bleated. "I'm alone with her here — she came and took me out of my bed. Max, don't you know my voice? Max, you're not gonna let me — Hou-hou-hou —" She dropped the phone and went staggering around in a sort of drunken circle, hands heeled to her eyes.

Jean picked it up again. His voice was sort of strained now. "Now, wait a minute. Don't you know you can't get away with —"

"You're gonna hear the shot right over this wire —" Then she heard something that went through her like a knife. The scream of a man in mortal agony sounded somewhere in the background, muffled, blurred in transmission. She moaned in answer to it.

Borden said, almost hysterically, "Wait a minute, wait a minute, that wasn't him, that was one of my own men — he, he got hurt here!"

"Then put him on the phone," she said. "I'll count five. Come over here, you! I'm holding the gun right at her!" She began to count, slowly, remorselessly. The woman was half-dead already, with sheer fright.

She could hear his breathing across the wire, hoarse, rasping. The tension was almost unendurable; she could feel her mind slipping.

"Four," she heard herself say. "Better put him on the phone quick!"

"I can't," came from the other end. "He's gone — half an hour ago. You're — too late!" There was a choked terror about the way he said it that told her it was true. She let the receiver drop to the end of its cord like a shot.

His wife read her doom in her eyes. She gave a single, long-drawn scream of nameless terror that hung in the

air. Then the pounding at the door told Jean why he'd come out with it like that just now, made no bones about it; they'd traced her fast, all right. They'd gotten here already — her address was on tap at the club — but just the same, he'd timed himself wrong. They weren't in yet, there was still a door between, and a pin can fall on a cartridge much quicker than a door can swing open! She'd been half an hour too late — but he'd been half a minute too soon! They'd both lost, and the winner was the same old winner — death.

A passkey turned in the door and a voice from the other world groaned, "Jean!"

She shivered all over and turned to look, and the hallman was holding Johnny up in the doorway. He was naked under a coat, and his feet were hobbled with copper wire, but his eyes were alive and he groaned it again, "Jean!" as the man brought him into the room, leaning on him. He'd kept his word, he'd stayed alive!

She saw through the open coat what they'd done to him, and choked back a scream. "They strapped the hell out of me," he said, and smiled a little, "but — but — I left before the finals —" And he fainted.

"Whisky!" she said. "Bandages — they're in there! Quick!"

Yet it wasn't as bad as it had looked. Cut-up wrists and ankles, a flaming chest and abdomen — but he'd stayed alive, he'd come back from a ride. The very same maroon death car was at the door right now! She pitched the gun into a corner. Mrs. Borden was sitting there snuffling a little, slowly calming down. She didn't make a move to go; seemed to be lost in thought — unpleasant thought.

He opened his eyes again, gave a deep sigh, like pain was a habit by this time. She gave him the cigarette he asked for, then went ahead washing and bandaging. Tears were slowly coursing down her cheeks, tears of gratitude. "No — no cops," she said to the hallman. "You see, it wouldn't do us any good. We're going to Miami. Can you make Penn Station with me, darling?"

He didn't tell her what they had intended doing; just told her what they'd actually done. "They kept sprinkling salt, as the belt buckle opened the skin. I gave a heave, I guess, I don't know; threw the one that was holding me down with his foot off balance, sort of forward. The buckle coming down caught him, tore his eye out. He went mad with pain, went for Beefy; picked up a sharp knife they had waiting for me. They had a terrible time with him. My arms were free, but my feet weren't. I kept rolling over and over — just to ease the burning at first — then I rolled right onto this flat freight-elevator that had no sides, pulled the rope and went all the way down, into the basement without knowing it. The car was there they'd brought me in, and the mechanic was dozing. I cracked him with a wrench, dragged myself in, drove it onto the elevator and managed to get off with

it at street level. Then I drove it all the way back here with a blanket around me, so I wouldn't get pinched for indecent exposure. The open air sort of kept me going —"

"It's my fault. Are you sorry," she sobbed, "you went straight?"

"No," he murmured. "It was worth it — even if I hadn't come back. Just help me with a pair of socks and shoes, and I can still make the train with you —"

Mrs. Borden was saying, in a strange smoldering voice, "I never thought he'd go that far — do that to any human being. At home he wouldn't hurt a fly — " She covered her eyes suddenly, as if to shut out the memory of Johnny's frayed, reddened skin before the bandages hid it from sight. "He — he would've killed you, if you hadn't gotten away!"

"That," said Johnny tersely, "seems to have been the chief idea."

"Why?" she wanted to know.

"Because I knew too much."

She seemed to be talking to herself more than to the two of them. "Oh, I'm not a plaster saint, God knows," she groaned. "I knew our money wasn't straight. I've always known it. Too much of it too quickly. I knew he was in beer back in the Twenties, and I know that lately he's been running clubs and sending girls on South American vaudeville tours —"

"Is that the new name for it?"

"But still and all," she went on, "I never thought he'd try to take someone's life. Oh, if someone doesn't stop him, he'll kill someone yet!"

All Johnny said was, "Yet?"

She stood up suddenly, staring at him. "Then you mean he has — already? Me and the kids, we been living on blood money! I guess I know the reason now why so many times the morning paper has whole columns torn out of it when I come to read it." She stared at the mink coat; suddenly sloughed it off, horrified. "What's that trying to tell me? It's turning red, look at it, bright red!" she screamed. "I've been living in the same house with a killer — sleeping with a murderer! He's gonna end up in the chair yet —"

"He's ten years overdue," Johnny muttered. "It's pretty late in the day to —"

"But it's not too late! I love him! I don't care what he's done! I'll save him from that. Anything but that! I'll put him where he's safe! If I can't have him, the chair won't get him either!" She picked up Jean's phone. "Get me the district attorney's office," she sobbed.

Jean was buttoning her husband's coat. "Lean on me, darling," she whispered. "We've got a date with ourselves down in Miami."

"Mrs. Maximilian Borden," the woman at the phone was saying as they limped out of the room arm-in-arm and quietly closed the door behind them. "You tell the attorney I want a personal interview with him — in strict confidence!"

— Continued from back cover

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